

# Healthy Living

## Risk factors for oral cancer

No one is immune from cancer. Millions of people from all walks of life and all age brackets are diagnosed with cancer each year, but there is much people can do to reduce their risk of developing the disease.

A 2020 study published in the International Journal of Preventive Medicine noted that oral cancer constitutes 48 percent of head and neck cancer cases. Authors of the study note that despite new management strategies for oral cancer, the five-year survival rate for the disease remains below 50 percent in most countries. While many people have survived an oral cancer diagnosis, the relatively low five-year survival rates for the disease underscore the utility of preventive measures all people can take to reduce their risk of developing the disease. Identifying risk factors for oral cancer, many of which are within individuals' control, can be a great first step toward reducing the likelihood of being diagnosed with the disease.

• Tobacco use: The Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention report that tobacco is one of the two most common risk factors for cancers of the oral cavity and pharynx. The University of Rochester Medical Center notes that all forms of tobacco increase oral cancer risk. That means certain tobacco products that some people consider safer than others are best avoided for anyone seeking to do all they can to reduce their risk for oral cancer. Cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco, chewing tobacco, and snuff all increase oral cancer risk, which increases the younger a person is when they begin using tobacco.

• Alcohol consumption: The CDC indicates alcohol consumption is the other of the two most common risk factors for cancers of the oral cavity and pharynx. The Oral Cancer Foundation reports that researchers now believe tobacco and alcohol synergistically interact, which means each substance increases the other's harmful effects. That's notable for people who consume alcohol and also use tobacco. Individuals who drink but do not

use tobacco should limit their consumption to no more than two drinks per day for men and one for women, as researchers believe the link between alcohol and oral cancer is dose-dependent. That means oral cancer risk increases considerably when people drink heavily, and is less among people who drink in modera-

tion and avoid tobacco.

• Sun exposure: The URM notes that extensive exposure to the sun increases the risk for lip cancer. When spending time in the sun, don't forget to protect your lips, ideally using a lip balm with a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 throughout the year.

• HPV infection:

The CDC notes that other factors (such as tobacco or alcohol) to increase cancer risk. Individuals are urged to speak with their physicians about HPV vaccination. While there is no way to fully prevent oral cancer, certain lifestyle choices and preventive measures can help people reduce their risk for the disease.

## What is polypharmacy?

Polypharmacy may contribute to complications that could jeopardize seniors' health. Johns Hopkins Medicine defines polypharmacy as the regular use of multiple prescriptions. According to data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey and the Canadian Health Measures Survey, 22 percent of adults between the ages of 40 and 79 in the United States and 19 percent of adults in that same age bracket in Canada took at least five medications in the 30 days prior

to participating in each survey.

Prescription medications are designed and prescribed to help people overcome various medical conditions, but polypharmacy can contribute to other issues that are worth noting, and some of those conditions can have an adverse effect on seniors' daily lives and overall well-being. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, symptoms of polypharmacy include:

- Reduced alertness
- Confusion or cognitive problems
- Falls and accidents

• Weakness and dizziness

• Loss of appetite

• GI problems such as diarrhea, constipation or incontinence

- Skin rashes
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Excitability

It's equally important that seniors recognize that polypharmacy affects aging adults differently than it affects younger people, as changes in body composition that are a natural part of aging can affect how the body reacts to medications and might affect how different medications interact with one another. The effects of new drugs on seniors also may be unknown, as Johns Hopkins Medicine notes that test subjects for medications may not include older adults.

Polypharmacy is a delicate situation and each individu-

al's reaction to taking multiple medications at once is unique. Seniors are urged to be open and honest with all health care professionals they interact with regarding the medications they're taking. Report any difficult or unusual side effects immediately. Seniors who feel they might be taking too many medications should address those concerns with their health care professionals, who may deprescribe a given medication and work with patients to find alternatives that can treat existing conditions without adversely affecting quality of life.

## Spot the Signs

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At Mount Nittany Health, we're proud to be a Primary Stroke Center, delivering expert, around-the-clock stroke care to our community. This means faster diagnosis, advanced treatment, and better recovery outcomes - because when it comes to stroke, time is everything.

Know the signs of a stroke and **BE FAST**:

- **Balance** - Sudden loss of balance
- **Eyes** - Vision changes or partial/total loss of sight
- **Face** - Facial drooping on one side
- **Arms** - Weakness or downward drift in one arm
- **Speech** - Slurred, confused or unusual speech
- **Time** - Call 911 immediately

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## Spring INTO BETTER HEARING

Spring is the season of fresh starts, and St Patrick's Day is a reminder that a little luck goes a long way. But when it comes to your hearing, healthy habits matter even more.

One simple way to support your hearing? *Get moving.* Try these gentle activities for a positive difference!



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