

Head and Neck Cancer

Risk. Awareness. Diagnosis.



What is head and neck cancer?



Head and neck cancer includes several types of cancers that affect the mouth, throat, thyroid, voice box or other parts of the head and neck. Head and neck cancers do not include brain cancer.

What causes head and neck cancers?

Head and neck cancers are caused by damaged cells, which can grow uncontrollably to form a cancer. Several factors can increase someone's risk of getting head and neck cancer, including smoking and drinking alcohol. Getting HPV (human papillomavirus) can also increase the risk of getting certain types of head and neck cancer.

Who can get head and neck cancer?

Anyone can get head and neck cancer, however it is three times more common in men than in women. This may be related to higher rates of smoking among men.

How common is head and neck cancer?

Head and neck cancer is the eighth most common cancer in the UK across both genders, and the fourth most common cancer in men.

How preventable is head and neck cancer?

46–88% of head and neck cancer cases in the UK are preventable through lifestyle choices. The wide range is because some types of head and neck cancer are very preventable – for example, 88% of pharynx (throat) cancer cases – while others are less so.

HPV can also increase the risk of some types of head and neck cancer, including oropharyngeal cancer (a type of throat cancer) and mouth cancer.

Is there a screening programme for head and neck cancer?

There isn't a national screening programme for head and neck cancer in the UK.

What if someone has a relative with head and neck cancer?

The vast majority of head and neck cancers are not inherited.

45%

of men aged 16–44 worry about getting cancer in the future

55%

of women aged 25–54 worry about getting cancer in the future.

12%

of men and women do not believe any risk factors are related to cancer

How are head and neck cancers diagnosed?

If your GP or dentist thinks your symptoms could be linked to cancer, they will refer you to see a specialist doctor within two weeks. This is usually an oral and maxillofacial surgeon, or an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist surgeon.

The type of tests that are carried out will depend on the area of change that has been noticed.



What are the signs or symptoms to be aware of?



While the symptoms of head and neck cancers depend on where the cancer started, the main ones are:

- An ulcer in the mouth for more than three weeks
- Red or white patches in the mouth
- A lump in the neck, on the lip or inside the mouth
- A sore tongue
- A sore throat
- Hoarseness
- Problems swallowing

These symptoms can happen for many reasons unrelated to cancer but if they are new for you or don't go away, you should contact your GP.

Different types of head and neck cancers also have their own symptoms. Pain or bleeding, lumps or swelling, in the head and neck, as well breathing problems, bad breath, changes to eating, speaking and hearing, or unexplained weight loss, should all be checked out by a doctor.

How treatable are head and neck cancers?

Treatment for head and neck cancers depends on the type of cancer, stage of cancer and someone's health. Around 45% of people diagnosed with head and neck cancers survive for 10 or more years.

Where can someone get more information about signs and symptoms?

You can find more information about the signs and symptoms of different types of head and neck cancer [here](#).

Whole Human Cancer Care, from Risk to Recovery.