

Management of Oral Pathology - Cysts, Tumors, and Infections

Oral pathology and oral infections can cause symptoms such as pain and swelling, but often there can be significant damage that is not noticed by patients and is seen by your dentist in xrays or by examination. We use state of the art diagnostic tools such as panoramic xrays, tomograms, and computerized 3D reformatted CT scans. Our microscopic evaluations of biopsies is done by the University of California and University of the Pacific Oral Pathology departments - two of the most respected oral pathology labs in the country.

Pathology is treated with laser surgery and microscopes when appropriate. We will discuss the details of the diagnosis and treatment in detail and supply you with copies of all pathology reports. Infections are managed with antibiotics, home care instructions, and surgery where necessary. Close follow-up and communications are critical to assure rapid recovery.

Oral Cancer

Because the mouth is a region where changes can be easily seen, oral cancer can be detected in its early stages. Performing a self examination regularly will help in the early recognition and detection of oral cancer, and increase the chance for cure.

Factors That May Cause Cancer

Research has identified a number of factors that may contribute to the development of oral cancer. The most common are the use of tobacco and alcohol. Others include poor oral hygiene, irritation caused by ill-fitting dentures and rough surfaces on teeth, poor nutrition, some chronic infections and combinations of these factors.

Studies have shown that the death rate from oral cancer is about four times higher for cigarette smokers than for nonsmokers. It is also widely believed in the medical field that the heat generated by smoking pipes and cigars irritates the mouth and can lead to lip cancer.

Those at an especially high risk of developing oral cancer are over 40 years of age, heavy drinkers and smokers, or users of smokeless tobacco, including snuff.

Signs of Oral Cancer



(a) white patches of the oral tissues — leukoplakia



(b) red and white patches — erythroleukoplakia



(c) and (d) an abnormal lump or thickening of the tissues of the mouth



(e) a mass or lump in the neck

Perform a Self-Exam Monthly

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons recommend that everyone perform an oral cancer self-exam each month. If you are at high risk for oral cancer — smoker, consumer of alcohol, user of smokeless tobacco, or snuff — you should see your general dentist or oral and maxillofacial surgeon for an annual exam.

An oral examination is performed using a bright light and a mirror:

- remove any dentures
- look and feel inside the lips and the front of gums
- tilt head back to inspect and feel the roof of your mouth
- pull the cheek out to see its inside surface as well as the back of the gums
- pull out your tongue and look at all of its surfaces
- feel for lumps or enlarged lymph nodes (glands) in both sides of the neck including under the lower jaw

Early Detection and Treatment Provide a Better Chance for Cure

When performing an oral cancer self-examination, look for the following:

- white patches of the oral tissues — leukoplakia (figure a)
- red patches — erythroplakia
- red and white patches — erythroleukoplakia (figure b)
- a sore that fails to heal and bleeds easily

- an abnormal lump or thickening of the tissues of the mouth (figures c and d)
- chronic sore throat or hoarseness
- difficulty in chewing or swallowing
- a mass or lump in the neck (figure e)

See your oral and maxillofacial surgeon if you have any of these signs. If the oral and maxillofacial surgeon agrees that something looks suspicious, a biopsy may be recommended. A biopsy involves the removal of a piece of the suspicious tissue, which is then sent to a pathology laboratory for a microscopic examination that will accurately diagnose the problem. The biopsy report not only helps establish a diagnosis, but also enables the doctor to develop a specific plan of treatment.

A Word About Oral Care

Keep in mind that your mouth is one of your body's most important early warning systems. Don't ignore any suspicious lumps or sores. Should you discover something, make an appointment for a prompt examination. Early treatment may well be the key to complete recovery.