

# Smoking: Taking You A Step Closer To Oropharyngeal Cancer

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Smoking, they say, is the leading cause of lung cancer world-wide. A recent study shows that, in the United States alone, 157,200 people have died of smoking-related lung cancer. Some of which are caused directly by smoking, and some due to second hand smoke. However the effect of smoking does not only stop at lung cancer.

## Smoking and cancer

Statistics show that smoking attributes to 54% of mouth cancers, 50% of esophageal cancers, and 70% of cancer of the larynx. And also, in relation to men and women's sexual health, smoking increases risks of cervical cancer by 19 to 80% depending on the frequency of consumption, and it also increases risks of penile cancer by 50%.

These numbers certainly prove that smokers are at a bigger likelihood to develop a lot of different kinds of cancers as compared to non-smokers. Male smokers have a 20% increased chances of developing lung cancer while women have a 13% increased risk.

Tobacco smoke is composed of four thousand different harmful substances, chemicals, and toxins. Sixty out of those four thousand chemicals are known to cause cancer. These cancer causing toxins are mainly found in tar that smokers inhale from a cigarette. About 70% of that tar stays inside the lungs. Studies have shown that benzpyrene, one of the carcinogens found in tar, damages and slowly destroys genes responsible for fighting cancer causing cells and subsequently prevent development of cancerous tumors. In almost 60% of smoking-induced cancers, these genes were seen to be damaged.

## Oral or throat cancer

Oropharyngeal cancer may involve the lips, mouth, tongue, gums, salivary glands, esophagus, larynx, thyroid glands, and/or the cells lining the throat. Its earliest symptom may be a pale lump inside the mouth that will not seem to heal. An estimated 7,000 Americans die of oropharyngeal cancer yearly. Smoking may cause cancer development in the mouth alone, on the throat alone, or a combination of both. Symptoms of oropharyngeal cancer may include the following:

- o A sore in your mouth that doesn't heal or increases in size.
- o Persistent pain in your mouth.
- o Lumps or white, red or dark patches inside your mouth.
- o Thickening of your cheek.
- o Difficulty chewing or swallowing or moving your tongue.
- o Difficulty moving your jaw, or swelling or pain in your jaw.
- o Soreness in your throat or feeling that something is caught in your throat.
- o Pain around your teeth, or loosening of your teeth.
- o Numbness of your tongue or elsewhere in your mouth.
- o Bad breath.
- o A swelling or lump in the throat.
- o A persistent cough.
- o Blood-flecked phlegm.
- o The sensation of something permanently stuck in the throat.
- o Voice changes, such as persistent hoarseness or huskiness.
- o Throat pain.
- o Referred pain into the ears.
- o Swallowing difficulties.
- o Breathing difficulties.
- o Swollen lymph glands.
- o Gastrointestinal disorders, such as excessive reflux, diarrhea or constipation.

## Treatment

Treatment of oropharyngeal cancer will depend on the size, type, and location of the cancer and whether it has already spread. It may include one or a combination of the following:

- o Surgery. This includes surgical removal of the tumor and its affected organs. The amount of tissue to be removed may depend on the size of the tumor and the mass it has already affected.
- o Radiation therapy. This includes exposing the cancer causing cells to small, precise doses of radiation.
- o Chemotherapy. It involves the use of cancer cell-killing medications that is used in conjunction to radiation therapy.
- o Long term monitoring. This may include regular examinations and x-rays to check that the cancer has not come back.
- o Rehabilitation therapy. This includes assistance from health professionals such as dietitians, speech therapists, and physiotherapists to regain motor functions of the affected areas.

The best way to avoid getting yourself into this situation is to avoid smoking. It is understandable that this will be difficult to do if you're a chain smoker. Cutting back on cigarette consumption may help to gradually get you into the path to being smoke free. All it takes in enough will power and discipline to keep yourself healthy and cancer-free.

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