



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

# Managing Oral Cancer

It can feel intimidating to be diagnosed with oral cancer, but understanding your condition is the first step to taking control of its symptoms. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

## Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

<b>Chemotherapy</b>	A widely used cancer treatment that consists of a variety of drugs that either stop the growth of cancerous cells or kills them. It should be noted that chemotherapy drugs that kill cancer cells often kill healthy cells as well, which accounts for the treatment's notorious negative side effects.
<b>Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)</b>	A sexually transmitted virus (very common) that has been linked to several different types of cancer including head and neck cancer.
<b>Malignancy</b>	Another term for cancerous cells or growths.
<b>Oral Cavity</b>	Includes your lips, cheek lining, front portion of your tongue, the floor of your mouth below the tongue, and your hard palate.
<b>Oropharynx</b>	Middle of the throat, base of the tongue and tonsils (below the soft palate and above the epiglottis).
<b>Pharynx</b>	The throat, specifically a muscular tube that connects the mouth and nasal passageways to the esophagus. Includes the back portion of the tongue.
<b>Radiation Therapy</b>	A cancer treatment that uses radioactive waves to kill cancer cells. Unlike chemotherapy, this treatment is localized to a specific area of the body. But like chemotherapy, it may kill healthy cells that are near the area of the tumor.
<b>Squamous Cell Carcinoma</b>	More than 90 percent of oral cancers are squamous cell carcinoma, meaning that the type of cells that are malignant are squamous cells—flat skin (epithelial) cells that are found in many different places in the body including the mouth.
<b>Stages of Oral Cancer</b>	There are four stages of oral cancer. Each is a classification based on how large your tumor is or how far the cancer has spread. Simplified, stage one means that your tumor is small and has not spread to surrounding lymph nodes; stage two means that the tumor is larger than 2 centimeters but still has not spread to the lymph nodes; stage three means that the tumor is either larger than 4 centimeters or has spread to one lymph node (or both); stage four consists of a tumor of any size that has spread to surrounding lymph nodes and tissues.

## Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage your oral cancer.

### About Symptoms

- What can be done to ease my specific symptoms including difficulty chewing, swallowing, and pain?
- Are there potential symptoms that I am not currently experiencing that I should be aware of because they might require emergency medical intervention?

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### About Causes & Risk Factors

- Do you know what may have caused my oral cancer and whether or not other family members including my children may be at risk?
- Are there any lifestyle changes that I can make at this point in time that will improve my prognosis such as discontinuing alcohol or tobacco products?
- Have I been tested for an HPV infection?

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### About Diagnosis

- Is there any question about my diagnosis? Do you recommend consulting other specialists or getting a second opinion at this time?
- Can you discuss with me now the specific type of oral cancer I have been diagnosed with?
- Has my cancer been staged? Can we go over the specifics of that?

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### About Treatment

- I understand that the three commonly used treatments for oral cancer are surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy. Which of these treatments do you believe will be necessary for me?
- What side effects should I expect?
- What will the recovery be like from these treatments?
- What is my prognosis with treatment?

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