

Cancer of the upper aerodigestive tract (cancer of the mouth, throat, voice box and sinuses)

Information for the public

Published: 10 February 2016

Last updated: 6 June 2018

www.nice.org.uk

Cancer in the airways of the head and neck: the care you should expect

Cancer in the airways of the head and neck includes cancer that starts in the mouth, throat, larynx (voicebox) or the sinuses (the air spaces in the bones of your face). Mouth cancer is the most common of these types of cancer. It tends to affect more men than women and is more common in older people. It is also much more common in people who smoke or drink heavily. The number of people in the UK with mouth cancer is predicted to rise by a third by 2035, according to Cancer Research UK. We want this guideline to make a difference to people with cancer in the airways of the head and neck by making sure that:

- when cancer is suspected your doctor uses the right scans and tests to find out the type and size of the cancer, where it is and if it has spread to other parts of the body (this is called staging)
- you get clear and balanced information about your cancer, how it might affect you and what support is available
- doctors fully involve you when decisions need to be made about different treatments, explaining what they mean for you and the likely results
- doctors use the right tests to decide whether surgery is a good option for you
- if you smoke your care team encourages you to stop. This is because it might affect how well your treatment works. You should be offered support to stop.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, especially when there is a choice of different treatment options, think about:

- What matters most to you – what do you want to get out of any treatment?
- What are you most worried about – are there risks or downsides to the treatment that worry you more than others?
- How will the treatment affect your day-to-day life, both during treatment and in the long term?
- What happens if you don't want to have treatment?

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Where can I find out more?

NHS Choices has more information about [head and neck cancer](#), including [mouth](#), [laryngeal](#), [nasopharyngeal](#) and [nasal and sinus](#) cancer.

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [Macmillan Cancer Support](#), 0808 808 00 00
- [Cancer Research UK](#), 0808 800 4040
- [Throat Cancer Foundation](#), 0203 4754 065
- [Cancer Laryngectomy Trust](#), 01422 205 522
- [Mouth Cancer Foundation](#), 01924 950 950
- [National Association of Laryngectomy Clubs](#), 0207 730 8585

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by cancer in the airways of the head and neck and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

ISBN: 978-1-4731-1662-7