

Diagnosing Mouth and Oropharyngeal Cancer - A Quick Guide



Contents

This is a brief summary of the information on 'Diagnosing mouth and oropharyngeal cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Tests for mouth cancer
- Further tests for mouth cancer
- What to ask your doctor

Tests for mouth cancer

You usually begin by seeing your GP. Your doctor will examine you and ask about your general health and about your symptoms. If you see a specialist, they will examine you and then arrange for you to have tests in the hospital out patients department.

Nasoendoscopy

A nasoendoscopy or laryngoscopy lets your doctor look at all your upper air passages. The specialist passes a narrow, flexible telescope (a nasoendoscope) up your nose and down your throat. You can have a local anaesthetic if you want to.

Having a biopsy

The only way to make a final diagnosis of mouth or oropharyngeal cancer is to take a

sample of tissue (a biopsy) and look at it under a microscope. There are different ways of taking a biopsy. A scalpel biopsy means cutting out a circle of tissue from the affected area under local anaesthetic.

Your doctor may ask you to come into hospital for a panendoscopy. A panendoscope is a series of connected telescopes that a head and neck surgeon uses to look at your upper airways. The test is done under general anaesthetic. The doctor can use the panendoscope to take a biopsy.

If your doctor can feel a lump in your neck, you may need to have a fine needle aspiration. This means putting a thin needle into the lump and drawing out cells and fluid. Your doctor may also use a fine needle biopsy to see if the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes in your neck.

Further tests for mouth cancer

You may have further tests once your doctor has found you have a cancer of the mouth or oropharynx. Further tests will help your doctor to decide on the treatment you need. Your doctor also needs to check whether the cancer has spread from where it started.



The tests you may have include

- Chest X-ray
- Scans – either a CT scan, an MRI scan or an ultrasound scan to give a detailed picture of the size of your cancer and whether it has spread.
- A Panorex X-ray which takes pictures right around the upper jawbone and lower jawbone
- A barium swallow - if you have difficulty swallowing solid food – you swallow a liquid that contains barium to show up the outline of any abnormal growth on X-ray

You will probably feel anxious when you are waiting for your test results. It may help to talk to a close friend or relative about how you are feeling. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group.

What to ask your doctor about mouth cancer tests

- What tests are you going to do?
- What are you looking for?
- Will the tests show whether I have cancer?
- How soon should I have these tests?
- Will you know what treatment I will need when you have the results?
- Will the tests show whether my cancer can be operated on?
- Are any of the tests painful?
- Do I need an anaesthetic for any of the tests?
- Do I need to prepare for any of the tests?

- Do any of the tests have after effects?
- Can I have these tests as an outpatient?
- Should I bring someone with me when I have these tests?
- How long will the results take?
- Who will give me the test results?

More information

For more information about mouth and oropharyngeal cancer, visit our website <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

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