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ORAL HEALTH KANSAS
Weekly Wednesday Update

*Our Mission:
To improve oral health
in Kansas through
advocacy,
public awareness
and education.*

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In This Issue

[Featured Article](#)

[Article Headline](#)

[Article Headline](#)

Quick Links

[Home](#)

[Our History](#)

[Dental Champions](#)

[Partnerships](#)

[Community](#)

[Coalitions](#)

[Contact Us](#)

**SAVE THE
DATE**



*A New
Decade for*

**Oral Cancer is a
Killer**

Most often oral cancer is preventable, and yet it has a higher death rate than many other cancers. It will cause over 8,000 deaths, killing roughly 1 person per hour, 24 hours per day. The causes come from lifestyle choices: smoking, using smokeless tobacco, and heavy alcohol drinking. The average age is 64 when it is diagnosed, which is why the death rate is high. However, one of Oral Health Kansas trainers reported that his 30 year old son-in-law died of oral cancer, after losing half his tongue, jaw and cheek in an effort to survive.



Film critic Roger Ebert lost his jaws due to complications from a form of head and neck cancer. *Photo compliments of Esquire.*

Head and neck cancers can take away a person's voice, disfigure a face, and destroy the ability to eat, drink and swallow. CNN Writer and Producer Madison Park sheds light on these cancers, their causes and implications.

Oral cancer can be identified earlier but published studies show that currently less than 15% of those who visit a dentist regularly report having had an oral cancer screening. Individuals can take responsibility for their own initial screening by watching for any sore, discoloration, prominent tissue, irritation, or hoarseness. If any of these symptoms do **not resolve within a two week period on its own, with or without treatment**, people should seek a professional opinion from a dentist. A new procedure is an oral brush biopsy a simple procedure done right in the dentist's chair.

To learn more about oral cancer and steps you can take to reduce your risks, here are some websites:

Oral Health:
THINK BIG

**2010
Oral Health Kansas
Conference**

*December
2nd & 3rd,
2010*

Capital Plaza Hotel
Topeka, Kansas

Join Our Mailing List!

The Oral Cancer Foundation www.oralcancerfoundation.org

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research www.nidcr.nih.gov
The Oral Cancer Exam Flyer
Spit Tobacco: A Guide for Quitting Booklet

Kansas Tobacco Use Prevention Program
<http://www.kdheks.gov/tobacco/cessation.html>

Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun-Times Movie Critic's Journal
http://blogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2010/01/nil_by_mouth.html

http://current.com/entertainment/movies/92179077_oral-cancers-toll-can-be-cruel-roger-ebert-goes-public-with-his-own-disfigurement.htm

The Oral Health-Oral Cancer Connection

By Chris Iliades, MD
Medically reviewed by Lindsey Marcellin, MD, MPH

Most cases of oral cancer are preventable, because the main risk factors include heavy drinking and smoking. But a healthy diet also can help prevent oral cancer; learn how.

According to the Oral Cancer Foundation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it is estimated that between 30,000 and 35,000 Americans were diagnosed with oral cancer last year. That's about 100 people every day - and most could have avoided hearing that diagnosis.

"Oral cancers are cancers that form on the lips, inside the mouth, and in the back of the throat, and they are 99 percent preventable," says Nadarajah Vigneswaran, BDS, DMD, professor of oral and maxillofacial pathology at the University of Texas Dental Branch in Houston.

Why? Because so many of the risk factors for oral cancers are also lifestyle choices.

"We know that smoking alone, heavy use of alcohol, the combination of alcohol and tobacco, and the human papilloma virus (HPV) are definite preventable risk factors for oral cancer, but poor nutritional status is also an important contributing factor," notes Dr. Vigneswaran.

Healthy Mouth: Diet and Oral Cancer

It can be confusing to keep track of the latest research on what vitamins may or may not help prevent cancer. Research is continuing to help us understand the role of diet in cancer. A growing number of studies do show that certain food groups help prevent cancer and also help fight cancer after you have been diagnosed. "The best nutrition for good oral health and for oral cancer prevention is a diet high in fruits and vegetables," recommends Vigneswaran.

That's because fruits and vegetables contain:

Antioxidants. These substances are found in fruits and vegetables and are believed to fight cancer by preventing DNA cell damage. If you have cancer, antioxidants may also be able to help your body repair cancer damaged cells. Vitamins C and E are strong antioxidants.

Phytonutrients and bioflavonoids. These are also antioxidants but they are not vitamins. Beta carotene is a phytonutrient that the body converts into vitamin A. It is found in carrots, peppers, and leafy green vegetables. Bioflavonoids are substances found in onions, apples, green tea, and red wine. Studies show that all these antioxidants, as part of a healthy diet, can reduce cancer risk.

As for vitamin supplements, studies to see whether vitamin supplements can reduce oral cancer and other cancers have not been as encouraging. Researchers believe that antioxidants are more effective when they are taken in

their natural state as part of a healthy diet. The American Cancer Society recommends getting your antioxidants through a diet high in common fruits and vegetables.

Healthy Mouth: Sugar and Sugar Substitutes

Sugar leads to tooth decay and poor oral health because when bacteria in your mouth come into contact with sugar, a type of acid is produced that attacks your teeth. Sugar-filled sodas, sugar-added fruit drinks, and sugary snacks can all lead to poor oral health. And this poor oral health can be a contributor to more than just cavities and gum disease. "Carcinogens are substances that are known to cause cancer. Poor oral health from long-standing dental and gum disease may make carcinogens more potent and more likely to cause oral cancer," explains Vigneswaran.

But what about the sugar substitutes?

Sugar alcohols like xylitol and sorbitol are used in sugar-free gum because they do not cause as much tooth decay and may help prevent cavities. There is even some evidence that xylitol-sweetened gum may lower your risk of getting cavities.

But these types of sweeteners have about the same amount of calories as sugar, so you'll want to be careful.

That said, chewing sugar-free gum is a good idea. "Sugar-free chewing gum can increase the flow of saliva and help keep bacteria from sticking to your teeth," advises Vigneswaran. The American Dental Association recommends chewing sugarless gum for 20 minutes following meals to prevent tooth decay.

Also, artificial sweeteners like saccharine and aspartame do not cause cavities and do not pack on calories. These sweeteners are added to many foods and drinks for the purpose of cutting calories.

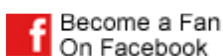
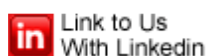
But beware of soda - even diet soda - because it can be dangerous, says Vigneswaran. "These sodas are very acidic and can eat away at tooth enamel causing tooth decay. You should always rinse your mouth or brush your teeth after you drink a diet soda."

Healthy Mouth: Mouthwash

"Although the jury is still out," says Vigneswaran, "some studies have found a link between frequent use of mouthwash that contains alcohol and oral cancer. We don't know if this is due to the alcohol acting as a carcinogen, or if it is because people who smoke and drink are likely to use more mouthwash. You can use a nonalcoholic mouthwash, or you can make your own using warm water with one-half teaspoon of baking soda and one-half teaspoon of salt."

You can do a lot to lower your risk of oral cancer. Avoid known risk factors like alcohol and tobacco, and unsafe oral sex that can result in HPV oral infection. Make sure your diet is high in antioxidant rich fruits and vegetables, and avoid foods high in sugar that can lead to tooth decay. Good oral health is the first step to prevent oral cancer.

If you have an idea, story or suggestion for a Oral Health Kansas Weekly Wednesday Update please send an email to jparnell@oralhealthkansas.org



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