

# MOUTH CANCER INFORMATION



Marie Keating

FOUNDATION

making cancer less frightening by enlightening

# THE SIMPLE FACTS ABOUT MOUTH CANCER

## The simple facts about Mouth Cancer

It is no surprise that the mouth is a prominent site in the body for developing cancer. Most cancer-causing chemicals that enter the body in our food, drink and by smoking do so through the mouth.

## Risks and causes of Mouth Cancer

The main causes of Mouth Cancer are tobacco and alcohol. The more you take of either, the greater the risk of Mouth Cancer. However, moderate drinking may not in itself be a risk. If you smoke and drink, the chances of Mouth Cancer are much higher; for example, those who smoke and drink heavily may have up to 25 times the risk of cancer than a non-smoker, non-drinker. Mouth Cancer is unusual in anyone under fifty, but can occur at any age, even in those who do not smoke or drink. Lip Cancer is mainly due to exposure to ultraviolet rays in sunlight.

## How you can reduce the risk

If you stop smoking completely and reduce drinking to a moderate level, your risk of Mouth Cancer begins to drop immediately. After a few years the risk is that of a non-smoker.

## The signs that should concern you

- Any sore or ulcer in the mouth that doesn't heal in two weeks
- Any colour change in the lining of the mouth
- Unexplained lumps on the lining of the mouth or on the jaws
- Difficulty in chewing, swallowing or speaking or problems moving the tongue or jaw
- A change in the way your teeth bite together

## What to do if you are concerned about Mouth Cancer

See your dentist as soon as possible. Your dentist is specially trained to look for early signs of Mouth Cancer. If you have difficulty getting an early appointment, tell the dentist why you feel you should be seen quickly.

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## **If you have one of these signs does it mean that you have Mouth Cancer?**

No, most of these signs are much more likely to be caused by non-cancerous diseases but it is important to have them checked out. Your dentist may want to get you seen by a specialist who may suggest a biopsy (removal of a piece of tissue for examination by a pathologist).

## **The importance of regular checks**

Your dentist, by carefully examining your mouth once a year or at your regular dental visit, can look for early signs of Mouth Cancer. Early detection and treatment may greatly improve survival and should reduce the extent of disfiguring surgery. Even if you wear dentures and don't need to see a dentist every year, go along for a good examination for early cancer and potentially malignant lesions.

## **Are there screening programmes for Mouth Cancer?**

No, the advice from the US National Cancer Institute is that a public health screening programme for Mouth Cancer is not useful.

## **Precancerous conditions**

Most white and red patches in the mouth are harmless but some are regarded as potentially malignant. If you have one of these, your dentist will probably want to have you seen by a specialist for treatment and/or for regular long-term observation.

## **How can you avoid getting Mouth Cancer?**

- Avoid the obvious risk factors, tobacco and excessive alcohol.
- Eat a healthy and nutritious diet as certain dietary deficiencies including iron deficiency may increase the risk of Mouth Cancer while fruit and vegetables seem to have a protective effect.
- Have a regular dental check.
- Examine your mouth occasionally after brushing and show anything unusual to your dentist.

- Protect your lips by staying out of the sun at the hottest parts of the day, by wearing a wide brimmed hat in direct sunlight and by using a high SPF lip cream.

## How is Mouth Cancer treated?

Most cases are treated by surgery, often with additional treatment by radiotherapy or chemotherapy. Most good units will have joint planning of the treatment by all the relevant specialists, including those whose job is to reconstruct the patient's face, jaws and teeth after treatment.

## Remember

Early detection and early treatment will give the best outcome for individuals with Mouth Cancer. See your dentist at least once a year for a comprehensive dental examination.

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## Who we are

Following the death of their mother Marie in 1998, each member of the Keating family promised that they would do everything they could to bring an end to Breast Cancer. They committed to provide all women and their families with the necessary information to prevent cancer or detect it at its earliest stages. Their collective aim was to make cancer less frightening by enlightening. The Marie Keating Foundation is the realisation of a family's dedication – it is a promise to themselves, in action.

The Marie Keating Foundation – Working together to beat cancer through awareness, education and support services.

By:

- Increasing awareness and knowledge on cancer related issues to all sectors of the community.
- Promoting early detection and treatment.
- Providing practical support services to those affected by cancer.
- Working closely with other cancer organisations to optimise efforts to eradicate cancer as a life threatening disease.

**The Foundation's vision is a future free from the fear of cancer**

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## What we do

### Public awareness

#### *Community information service*

The Foundation, through its mobile information units, reaches out to as many people as possible. The Foundation believes that by doing so, more people will not only become more aware of the risk factors but also become our partners in spreading our education message.

We have in-unit information presentations as well as prosthetic teaching aids on board in order to educate, show and highlight the importance of early detection and self awareness. The unit is equipped with take home information leaflets on each of the key cancers and our trained nurses provide the public with practical advice on healthy lifestyle choices.

#### *Workplace presentations*

Our nurses also visit workplaces and community groups as part of our health promotion message. They offer advice and help to groups of men and women as part of annual health days or as a once off assistance to staff. Arrangements can also be made for staff to speak to our nurse individually and in strict confidence.

#### *National campaigns*

Focussing on the key cancers, the Foundation invests in a number of major media campaigns throughout the year. October is internationally recognised as breast cancer awareness month and the Foundation mounts a month long targeted campaign using radio and print media to communicate the message of early detection. Other campaigns focus on men's cancers with our Men Keeping Fit campaign, as well as other specific more targeted ones.

### Education

The Foundation, in recognising the importance of education of young people in reducing the prevalence of cancer, invested in the development of a schools programme targeted at senior level students in addressing the facts, risks, and the need for early intervention. The programme can be adapted for use with other young people in different settings.

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### The comfort fund

This fund assists those in financial difficulty as a direct result of their illness. Working in close partnership with the Irish Breast Care Nurses Association, the Foundation provides financial support for practical assistance with childminding or transport costs, hotel accommodation before or after treatment, or even for a well deserved weekend break. We consider that this service is essential in minimising the day to day problems facing women during treatment, in addition to the already existing trauma and uncertainty.

### The oncology waiting room refurbishment programme

Where the need arises, the Foundation refurbishes hospital oncology waiting rooms in making them more comfortable for patients who use them, often for long and protracted periods of time.

*On February 2nd 1998, our mother Marie died from Breast Cancer. At the time and all through her illness, we could do nothing to help our Mother who had, all our lives, done everything for us.*

*We, the Keating family have set up this charity in her name to try to help and prevent others going through what Mam went through and what we are still going through to this day. This is also to show that such a wonderful mother and person did not die in vain.*

*Take care.*



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