

## Cancer in the Mouth

Oral cancer is not something you hear about on a routine basis. Oral cancer has been related to smoking, chewing tobacco, irritation of oral soft tissue, various foods, alcohol, and many other potential causes. However, contrary to popular knowledge, oral cancer has a higher death rate than the more well-known cancer, melanoma. There are about 30,000 new cases of oral cancer each year in the U.S. When oral cancer is treated, often the result is disfiguring to the face. Oral cancer is often fatal. Your dentist has several methods to determine if you may have this disease. Among them are:

- Visual examination and palpation (feeling) in the areas of potential cancer involvement.
- Scraping away a small amount of soft tissue with a brush, to be analyzed later.
- Use of various lights that detect potential cancer cells.
- A biopsy, in which a small amount of soft tissue is removed and sent to a laboratory for examination.

After your dentist has analyzed your oral condition and looked for any signs or symptoms of cancer, have a discussion with him or her relative to what was found in your mouth. Your dentist is well educated concerning detection of cancer and what to do in the event this condition is found. Early detection of oral cancer can lead to successful treatment and long-term cure.

Various cancer specialists treat oral cancer as with cancer in other parts of the body. Your dentist will refer you to these specialists if cancer is detected or suspected.