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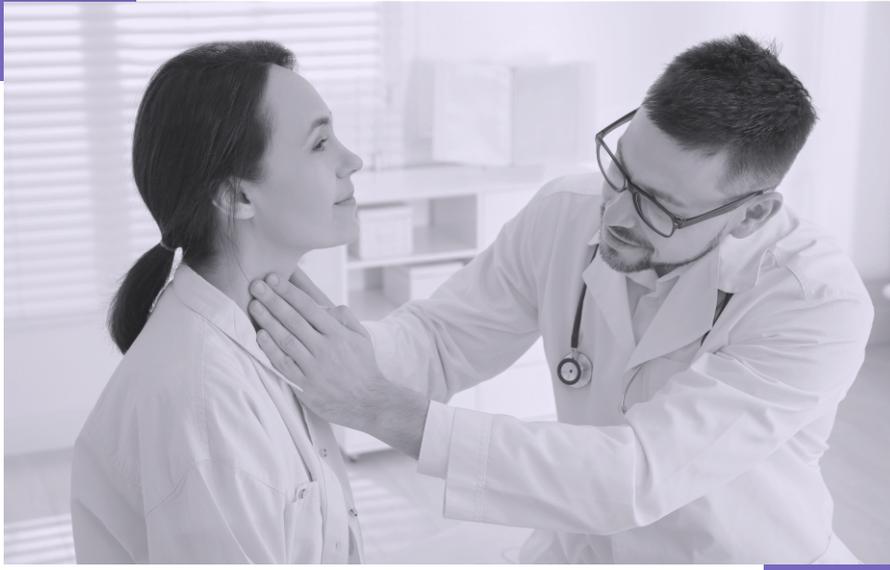
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Understanding **Head & Neck Cancer**



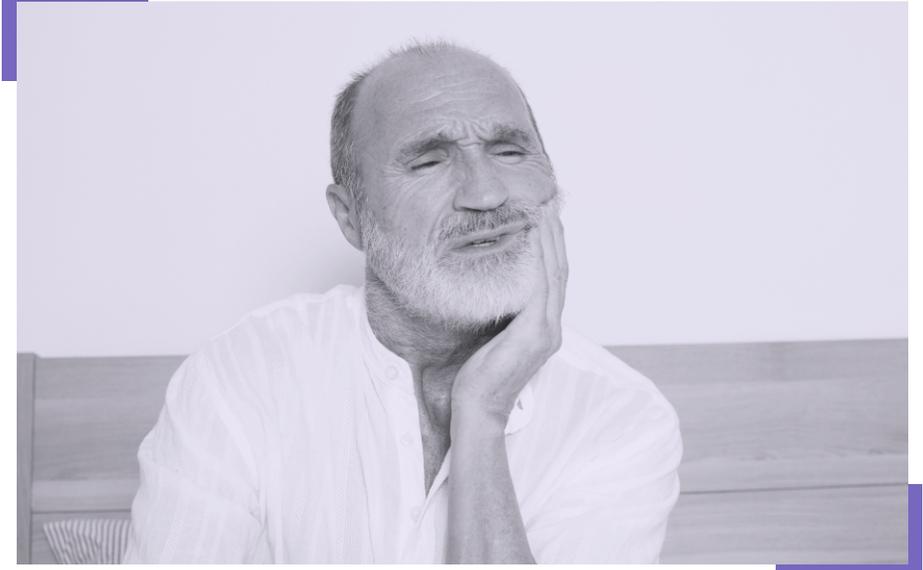
Introduction

Head and Neck Cancer is a type of cancer that develops in the mouth, throat, salivary glands, nose, voice-box, or other areas of the head and neck. It usually begins in the squamous cells that line the moist, mucosal surfaces inside the head and neck.

What are the types of Head and Neck Cancer?

The different types of Head and Neck Cancers are known as squamous cell carcinomas of the head and neck.

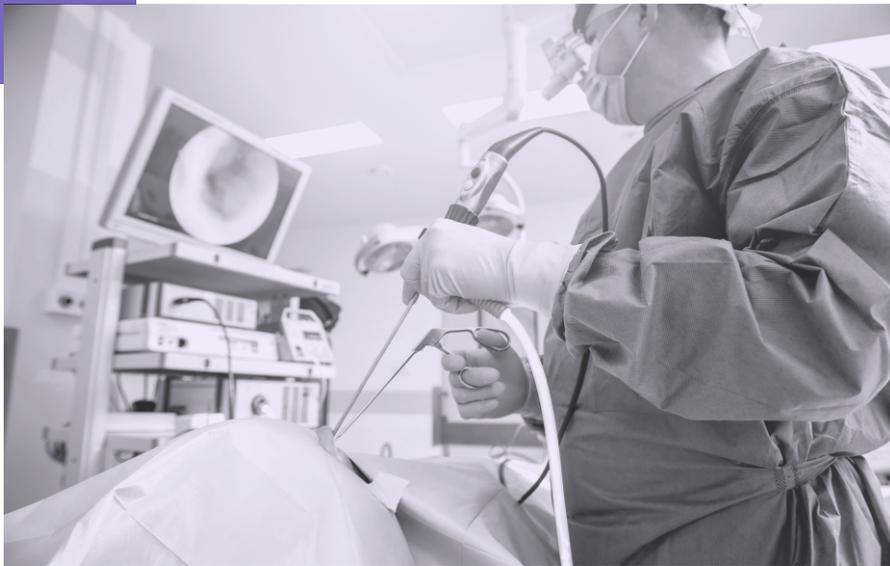
- Oral Cavity Cancer
- Oropharyngeal Cancer (tongue, tonsils, etc.)
- Thyroid Cancers
- Nasopharyngeal Cancer
- Cancers of the Larynx
- Cancer of the Salivary Glands
- Nasal cavity and Paranasal Sinus Cancer



What are the indications for Head and Neck Cancer?

Signs and symptoms of Head and Neck Cancer include:

- Ache or swelling or ulcer in the head or neck region that does not heal.
- A patch of red or white colour in the mouth
- Painful or painless lump, bump, or mass in the head or neck area
- Jaw pain
- Difficulty in breathing
- Constant sore throat
- Loosening of teeth
- Sudden weight loss
- Ear pain or discharge
- Double vision
- Foul mouth odour that is not usual
- Hoarseness or change in voice
- Lasting nasal congestion or nasal obstruction
- Unusual nasal discharge, frequent nose bleeds, or both
- Weakness or numbness in the head and neck region
- Difficulty in chewing, swallowing, or moving the tongue, jaw, etc.
- Traces of blood in the saliva or phlegm



How is Head and Neck Cancer diagnosed?

- Physical examination
- HPV Testing
- Endoscopy
- Biopsy or FNAC
- Staging Tests
- USG (ultrasound)
- CT Scan
- MRI
- PET-CT

What are the possible treatments for Head and Neck Cancer?

Surgical Process

There are five types of surgeries performed for removing the cancer tumour:

- **Robotic Surgery:** It is an advanced MIS technique that treats complex cancer cases by accessing through an incision. It facilitates better surgical and cosmetic outcomes, and can help avoid chemoradiation.



- **Laser Technology:** With laser surgery, an early-stage tumour found in the larynx is targeted.
- **Excision:** To remove a cancerous tumour and some surrounding healthy tissue.
- **Lymph Node Dissection or Neck Dissection:** For advanced cancer treatment to remove lymph nodes in the neck.
- **Reconstructive (Plastic) Surgery:** If major tissue removal is required such as removing the jaw, tongue, skin, or pharynx, then reconstructive or plastic surgery may be done to replace the missing tissue, e.g. free flap reconstruction.

Radiation Therapy

It involves the use of high energy waves to kill cancer cells, limit toxicity and improve results.

Chemotherapy

It involves the use of powerful medicines to kill cancer cells.

Targeted Therapy

This therapy targets cancer's specific genes, proteins, or the tissue environment that contributes to cancer growth and survival.



Immunotherapy

This therapy involves the use of medicines that prompt the body's immune system or natural defenses to destroy cancer.

What are the precautions one must take to avoid Head and Neck Cancer?

- Avoid the use of tobacco, gutka, etc.
- Avoid the use of marijuana and excessive smoking
- Heavy consumption of alcohol is prohibited
- Use sunscreen and lip balm with an adequate sun protection factor (SPF) on a regular basis
- Protect yourself against HPV infection by getting the HPV vaccine and practicing safe sex
- Avoid excessive exposure to sun
- Wear a protective face mask if you get exposed to toxic fumes and dust for a longer duration
- Maintain proper care of dentures; poorly fitted dentures can trap tobacco and alcohol's cancer-causing substances
- Drink lots of water

Are there any risk factors involved?

Some of the major factors that lead to Head and Neck Cancer include:

- **Tobacco:** Chewing tobacco is the single largest risk factor associated with Head and Neck Cancer.
- **Smoking:** Excessive smoking can increase the risk of such type of cancer.
- **Alcohol:** Drinking alcohol is the second largest risk factor for cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, and oesophagus.
- **Gender:** Males are twice more probable of developing Head and Neck Cancer as compared to females.
- **Age:** People over the age of 50 are more likely to develop Head and Neck Cancer.
- **Certain Illnesses:** Certain kind of illness such as Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) and two inherited genetic syndromes - Fanconi Anaemia and Dyskeratosis Congenita are linked to Head and Neck Cancer.
- **Sun Exposure:** Prolonged exposure to the sun may increase the risk of Oral and Lip Cancer.
- **Radiation Therapy:** High doses of radiation therapy, particularly in the head and neck, tend to increase the risk of developing Head and Neck Cancer.
- **Malnutrition:** Deficiencies of vitamins and nutrition may raise a patient's risk of developing the disease.
- **Vaping:** Vaping e-cig also contributes to this type of cancer, although more studies are needed.