

# Tongue Cancer

By Jean Jeffers, Staff Writer

Henry is a 66-year-old white male who is suffering from oral cancer. He is a long-standing alcoholic, and has smoked for 40 years. He went to the doctor with a wart-like, reddish growth on the side of his tongue.

Cancer occurs when cells in the body, in Henry's case the tongue, divide without control or order. Normally, cells divide in a regulated manner. If cells keep dividing uncontrollably when new cells are not needed, a mass of tissue forms and this is called a growth or tumor. Tongue cancer is a common and serious condition. It usually begins in the squamous cells lining the tongue.

"There are two kinds of tongue cancer: oral tongue cancer and cancer at the base of the tongue," says Dr. Joseph Valentino, a surgical oncologist who specializes in head and neck cancers at the University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Center in Lexington. Oral tongue cancer usually begins as a small tumor on the side of the tongue and occurs

because of irritation to the area. It is relatively easy to treat and cure in its initial stages.

The other type of tongue cancer is located at the base of the tongue and develops on the back two thirds of the tongue. It is considered to be in the oropharyngeal region. This type of cancer may cause difficulty swallowing or it may simply present with a neck mass.

The chief factors increasing the chances of developing tongue cancer include smoking and heavy use of alcohol.

"There is a rising epidemic of the cancer at the base of the tongue. It occurs more often in younger people, with no history of drinking or smoking. We are finding that HPV (human papillomavirus) is commonly the cause of tongue cancer at the base of the tongue," says Dr. Valentino.

It is estimated that 75 percent of this type of cancer is related to the human papillomavirus.

The treatment for tongue cancer of the anterior region is surgical

removal of the tumor and nearby tissues and sometimes the lymph nodes. If surgery is not planned, radiation is the treatment of choice and is done with or without chemotherapy. Cancer at the base of the tongue is treated by radiation to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors.

When the disease is caught early, oral cancer patients, have an 80 to 90 percent survival rate. The problem is that the patient may first be seen in later stages, when metastasis has occurred, with the cancer spreading usually to the lymph nodes, sometimes through the blood stream to the lungs or other organs. Advanced disease is

harder to treat, accounting for the high death rate — about 43 percent at five years from diagnosis.

One of the more difficult aspects of treating tongue cancer is the extensive therapy needed, and the side effects that may linger. Post-operative disfigurement is less common than in the past, with advanced reconstructive techniques, but all patients are left to cope with some impairment of the oral functions of speech and swallowing. When radiation is given, tongue cancer patients may lose their sense of taste, either temporarily or permanently. They may have dry mouth, be nauseated, have little desire for food and/or they may have difficulty swallowing. Since the patient generally loses a lot of weight, a feeding tube may be inserted into the abdomen to give nourishment.

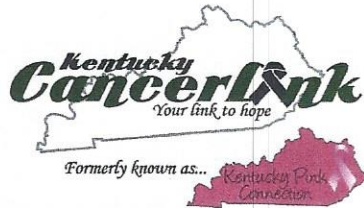
Cancer of the tongue is associated with the human need for communication and social interaction. Tongue cancer may change the body image. Some patients become depressed and withdrawn. It is a challenge for the client and his/her family, as well as the medical staff, to overcome the very real deficits that exist.

### About the Author

Jean is an RN, a writer, and a cancer survivor herself. She lives in Cincinnati.

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—Dr. Joseph Valentino, University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Center



Thursday, October 2, 2014  
 Registration: 5:30 pm  
 Hot Seat Event: 6:00-9:00 pm  
 Ticket Price: \$100 (includes dinner)  
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Hear former UK players, colleagues and friends share their best stories and insights about Coach Hall while supporting a great cause! Roasters/Toasters will include Coach Denny Crum, Terry McBrayer, Ben Chandler and other special guests! We are pleased to have Jack "Goose" Givens as emcee for the event!

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