

# Save More Than A Tooth



by Wm. J. Schlotz, D.D.S.

As a minimally invasive practicing dentist I preach that early detection and intervention is a means to total, sustainable dental health. I routinely use this space to make the case for “early in” leading to “less invasion” resulting in “stronger teeth”. Past articles (I like to think they’re timeless) can be read at [TheConservativeDentist.com](http://TheConservativeDentist.com) website.

The same early detection mindset is so vitally important when the subject shifts from hard to soft tissue in the mouth. Normally, this would be my cue for an educational moment concerning periodontal (gum) disease. Not today. Du Jour, oral cancer, with all of its seriousness, is the topic.

On a global scale, oral cancer is growing at an alarming rate (any growth is alarming when it’s occurring inside of your mouth). New cases of oral cancer approach ½ million each year. In the United States, more than 20 oral cancer victims die *every day*. Statistically, I could impress further, but you get the picture. It’s serious and not all that rare.

Sadly, the death rate associated with oral cancer is high because it is usually discovered and diagnosed at a very late stage. Not many folks spend all that much time looking inside their mouths away from their teeth. Oral cancer manifestations can be painless and little in the way of physical changes may be obvious. Many of the lesions can be mistaken for innocuous mouth sores caused by such common things as tongue or cheek biting, canker and cold sores, etc.

My friend and dentist practice partner-colleague of nearly 7 years died of cancer of the lung within the past year. It might have spread there from the mouth. Nearly 5 years ago he asked me to look at a persistent lesion on the side of his tongue. To me its appearance merited further attention. I suggested he see a specialist, and he did. For whatever reason (and I won’t speculate), however, a biopsy was not taken until many *months* later. The diagnosis of oral cancer was then confirmed. The lesion was later removed and no other signs of cancer were evident for a few years until the discovery in his lung.

I strive to make all my articles useful and this one most certainly should be no different. Remember, if oral cancer were found, diagnosed and treated *early* its cure rate would be markedly higher. Leave head-in-the-sand mentality to the Dodo birds. Any sore, discolored area (or one that bleeds easily), that persists for more than 14 days should be looked at by a professional. Other symptoms such as a palpable lump or other mass type, discomfort upon swallowing, hoarseness or numbness should be accurately diagnosed. Lastly (*certainly not in priority*), state-of-the-art periodic dental examinations include oral cancer examinations. See your dentist and Keep Smiling!

*Dr. William J. Schlotz, DDS*

*Plaza Health Dentistry 314.843.0500*

*9420 Watson Road, Crestwood.*

*[TheConservativeDentist.com](http://TheConservativeDentist.com)*