

Oropharyngeal Cancer

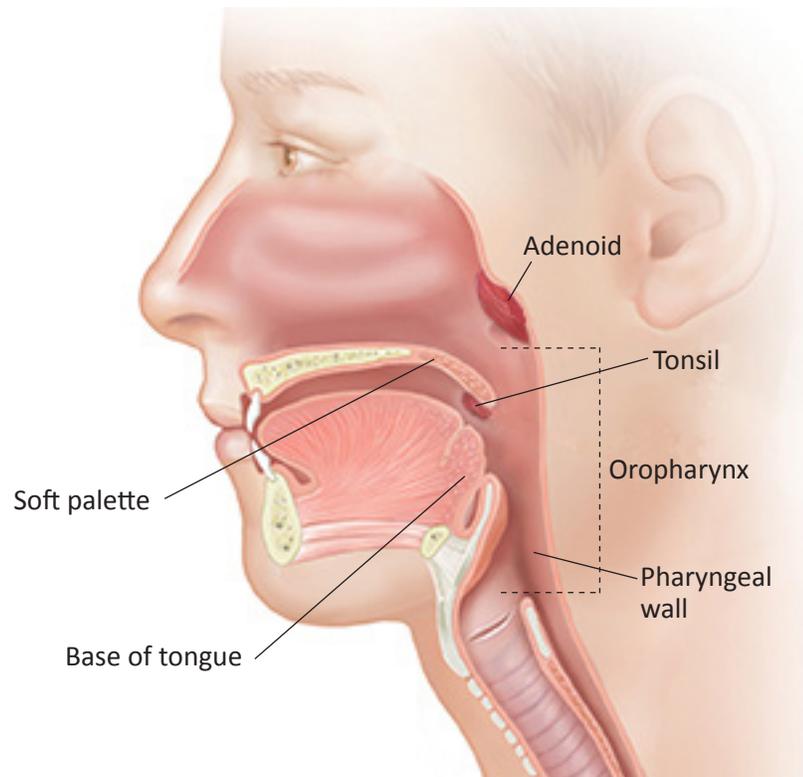
What is oropharyngeal cancer?

The oropharynx is the middle area of the throat that includes the following:

- Tonsils
- Base of tongue
- Soft palate
- Pharyngeal wall

Cancer arising in the oropharynx is called oropharyngeal cancer.

If you have any questions, please ask your nurse or physician.



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What causes oropharyngeal cancer?

The 2 most common causes of oropharyngeal cancer are a prior infection with human papilloma virus (HPV) and smoking.

Currently, the type of oropharyngeal cancer that is caused by HPV infection is much more common. This type of cancer arises in either the tonsil or base of the tongue.

What are the symptoms?

Some of the symptoms of oropharyngeal cancer include:

- Feeling like something is stuck in the throat
- Sore throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- Lump or enlarged lymph node in the neck
- Ear pain

How is oropharyngeal cancer diagnosed?

Clinical evaluation by a head and neck surgeon is required to accurately outline the extent of cancer.

A biopsy is a procedure in which a small piece of tissue is removed from the tumor in the throat to check for cancer. This can be done in the office if the tumor in the throat is easy to access. If not, a procedure under general anesthesia in the operating room may be necessary. Another type of biopsy is a fine needle aspiration (FNA) in which tissue from neck lymph nodes is removed through a thin needle. The tissue is then examined under the microscope. An ultrasound is often used to direct the needle precisely into the nodule. An FNA is done in the surgeon's office.

Imaging studies including a CT scan and a PET scan may be ordered to obtain a clearer picture of the tumor size and location. The scans will also look for any spread of disease into the lymph nodes, lungs or bones.

Resources:

www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/treatment/oropharyngeal/Patient/page1

For more information, please contact:

Head and Neck Multidisciplinary Clinic at Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Galter Pavilion, 675 North Saint Clair Street
Suite 15-200
Chicago, Illinois 60611

Phone: 312.695.8182

Fax: 312.695.6298

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

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Developed by: NMH Head and Neck Multidisciplinary Clinic