

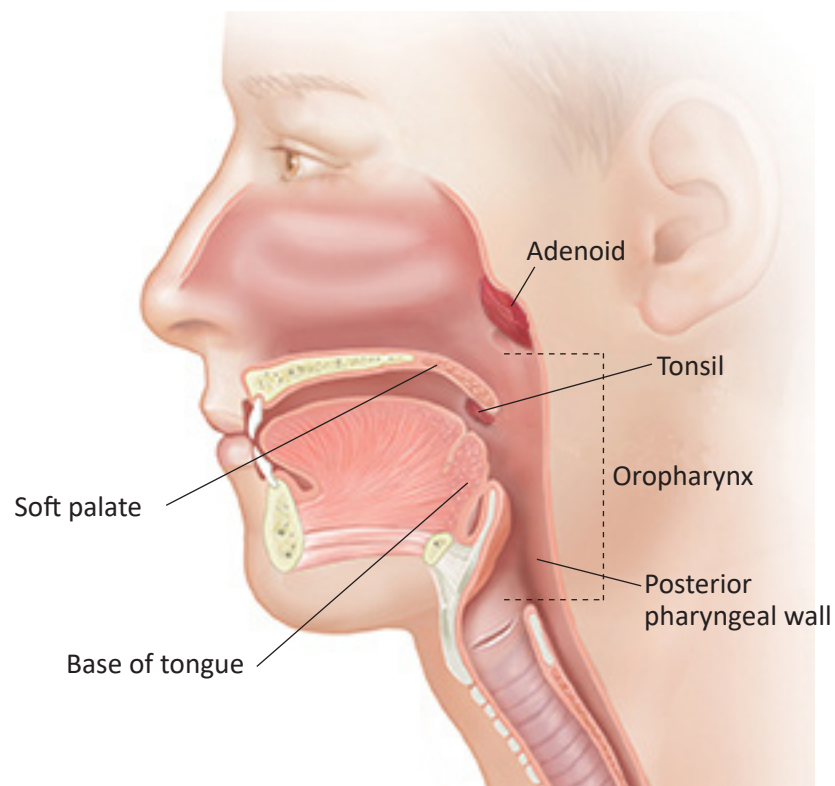
Oropharyngeal Cancer

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

- Tonsils
- Base of tongue
- Soft palate
- Posterior pharyngeal wall

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

Oropharyngeal cancer is cancer that occurs in the oropharynx.



© 2018 Krames Staywell LLC

Causes of oropharyngeal cancer

The most common cause of oropharyngeal cancer is a prior infection with human papilloma virus (HPV). This type of cancer occurs in the tonsil or base of the tongue.

Smoking also can cause oropharyngeal cancer.

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 oropharyngeal cancer is diagnosed

If your physician thinks you may have oropharyngeal cancer, you will need to see a head and neck surgeon. They will examine you.

To confirm a cancer diagnosis, your surgeon will perform a biopsy. That means the surgeon will remove a small piece of tissue from the tumor in the throat to check for cancer. The surgeon can do this in the office if the tumor in the throat is easy to access. If the tumor is not easy to access, they will do this under general anesthesia in the operating room.

Another type of biopsy is a fine needle aspiration (FNA). The surgeon can do this at an office visit. They will remove tissue from the neck lymph nodes using a thin needle. They often use an ultrasound device to guide the needle into the lymph node. They examine the tissue under a microscope to look for cancer.

The surgeon may order imaging studies, including a CT scan and a PET scan. These will give a clearer picture of the tumor size and location. The scans can also show if the cancer has spread into the lymph nodes, lungs or bones.

Resources

[cancer.gov/types/head-and-neck/patient/adult/oropharyngeal-treatment-pdq](https://www.cancer.gov/types/head-and-neck/patient/adult/oropharyngeal-treatment-pdq)

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 (TTY: 711)
Fax: 312.695.6298