



NCCN QUICK GUIDE™ Oral Cancers

This NCCN QUICK GUIDE™ sheet summarizes key points from the complete [NCCN Guidelines for Patients®: Oral Cancers](#). These guidelines explain which tests and treatments are recommended by experts in cancer. To view and download the guidelines, visit [NCCN.org/patients](#) or, to order printed copies, visit [Amazon.com](#)

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What are oral cancers?

They are cancers of the inner lip and mouth. Most form from cells in the first tissue layer.	8
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What are cancer stages?

■ A cancer stage is a rating of the cancer based on test results. Stages for oral cancer range from stage 0 to stage 4. Stage 4 is further grouped by the letters A through C. Doctors write these stages as—stage 0, stage I, stage II, stage III, stage IVA, stage IVB, and stage IVC.	12
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What health care is given before treatment?

■ A report of your health history and an exam of your body	16
■ Help for distress or tobacco use, if needed	17
■ An exam of your teeth and mouth by a dentist and maybe by a prosthodontist	18
■ An x-ray of your entire mouth, called a Panorex, if needed	18
■ Detailed images of your mouth, neck, or chest, if needed (ie, CT scan, MRI scan)	19
■ Detailed pictures with PET/CT scan for stage II or IV is an option	19
■ An exam to assess if anesthesia is safe, if needed	20
■ An exam of your throat with a scope, if needed	20
■ Removal of tissue samples to test for cancer	21
■ Help with eating or talking, if needed	21



What are the treatment options for early oral cancers?

■ Surgery and radiation therapy are options for stages I and II. More treatment may follow to help prevent the cancer from coming back.	24
■ After treatment, see your cancer doctor often. He or she will assess treatment results. Also, see your dentist, and if needed, get help with talking and eating.	26
■ If the cancer returns, treatment options partly depend on where the cancer is.	27

What are the treatment options for advanced oral cancers?

■ For stages III, IVA, and IVB (T1–T4a), surgery is preferred by NCCN experts if it can be done. Another option may be radiation therapy with or without cancer drugs. Or, a clinical trial may be right for you.	29
■ After treatment, see your cancer doctor often. He or she will assess treatment results. Also, see your dentist, and if needed, get help with talking and eating.	31
■ If the cancer returns, treatment options partly depend on where the cancer is.	32

What are the treatment options for very advanced oral cancers?

■ For stages IVB (T4b) and IVC, treatment options are based on your ability to do activities. Your doctor will rate your ability using a performance scale.	34
■ For stage IVB (T4b), options include radiation with or without cancer drugs, cancer drugs alone, or care to improve quality of life.	
■ For stage IVC, options include cancer drugs and care to improve quality of life. Some cancers may be treated with surgery or radiation if they are small.	

How can you decide between options?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Don't be shy and ask your doctors questions. They are there to help. ■ Get a second opinion. Even doctors get second opinions. ■ Support groups can be helpful. You can learn a lot from others. ■ Compare the pros and cons of each option. 	38
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