

# Q HEAD AND NECK CANCERS

## & A

By Lanceford M. Chong, MD, MPH  
 Chief, Department of Radiation Oncology  
 Cancer Treatment Centers of America®  
 Western Regional Medical Center,  
 Goodyear, Arizona



### CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE VARIOUS TYPES OF HEAD AND NECK CANCERS?

There are several anatomic groups that make up head and neck cancers, each with its own natural history and treatment approach. Head and neck cancers include skin of the face, lips, oral cavity (oral tongue and floor of mouth), oropharynx (soft palate, tonsils, and base of tongue), larynx (true vocal cord), hypopharynx, thyroid gland, and salivary glands. It is important to understand that all of these are separate anatomic groups that require different treatment approaches with their own natural histories as well as therapeutic approaches.

### WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR HEAD AND NECK CANCERS?

Major risk factors for head and neck cancers include consuming alcohol, chewing tobacco, and smoking cigarettes, pipes, and cigars. A considerable risk factor for thyroid cancer is previous exposure to radiation.

### ARE THERE COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HEAD AND NECK CANCERS?

In general, typical signs and symptoms of head and neck cancers include soreness of throat or mouth, persistent hoarseness, earaches, and swallowing difficulties.

### ARE THERE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS THAT A PERSON NEWLY DIAGNOSED WITH A HEAD AND NECK CANCER SHOULD ASK HIS OR HER CARE TEAM?

An educated patient is an empowered patient. It is important to ask your care team questions to help you understand the disease as well as the options and the treatment plans. Here are some general questions I recommend asking yourself to ensure that you have the information you need to become an empowered patient:

- Do I fully understand my medical condition?
- Have all of my treatment options been thoroughly explained?

- Have all of the symptoms I may be experiencing been addressed?
- Have all of my pain issues been addressed?
- Do I know which medications I am taking and how to take them?
- Has my care team explained the do's and don'ts of my treatment?
- Have I asked about potential side effects of treatment or medication?
- Have I met with my integrative medical team?
- Have I asked my care team how they can improve my quality of life?
- Do I need to speak to a financial counselor?
- Do I know how my care manager can help me manage my care?
- Do I need help with coordinating my care when I return home?
- Do I know where I am going for my next appointment?
- Have all of my questions been answered?

Additionally, I recommend asking the following questions specifically related to head and neck cancers:

**Is my cancer HPV 16 positive?**

Having human papillomavirus (HPV) is a proven risk factor of cervical and other types of cancer and is also associated with cancer at the base of the tongue and the tonsils. HPV 16 positivity in nonsmokers is associated with a much better prognosis, with cure rates of 80 to 90 percent. In contrast, the cure rate of an HPV 16-negative patient with a history of heavy drinking or smoking decreases to 30 to 40 percent.

**What kind of education and experience with head and neck cancer does my radiation oncologist have?** Few radiation oncologists are very experienced with many of these

types of cancers. That is largely due to the fact that head and neck cancers are rare. The anatomy is challenging, and the care and treatment approaches of these types of patients are very intensive and sophisticated for radiation oncologists who are not experienced.

**Will I have a multidisciplinary team supporting my treatment?** To have the best success in beating head and neck cancers, it is important to have an entire team. It is recommended that your team include a medical oncologist, radiation oncologist, surgical oncologist, naturopathic physician, nutritionist, and a mind-body therapist who coordinate your care and work together to offer the best individualized treatment plan for you.

**HAVE THERE BEEN ANY RECENT ADVANCES IN THE TREATMENT OF HEAD AND NECK CANCERS THAT ARE ESPECIALLY EXCITING?**

The most exciting recent advancement in the treatment would be the organ preservation approach. Surgery used to be almost a mandate when a patient presented with a head and neck cancer, but now there is a more judicious approach when considering surgery as an option. Surgery for head and neck cancers often results in functional problems and long-term physical deformities. Now, in selected patients using systemic therapy (either chemotherapy or Erbitux® [cetuximab]), intensity-modulated radiation therapy can take the place of surgery to allow for a higher quality of life during treatment and after, while achieving cancer remission. **CFThrive**



## Breast Health Why Wait?

### Know the Power of SUPER MESHIMA

Today's women are increasing their awareness regarding breast health and taking proactive measures towards protection and prevention. **Super Meshima** is an all natural dietary supplement formulated with this is mind.

**Meshima** is a mushroom that has been widely researched for it's immune-enhancing activities.\* An extract of this mushroom, developed by Mushroom Wisdom, Inc., shows a particular affinity for supporting and maintaining healthy breast tissue.\* **Super Meshima** contains this highly concentrated extract, making this an ideal product to support, protect and defend healthy breast tissue.\*



**20% Off Your first Order,**  
Code CFT12



THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE

**1-800-747-7418**  
[www.mushroomwisdom.com](http://www.mushroomwisdom.com)

\* These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.