



Oropharyngeal Cancer



Overview

This is a cancer of your middle throat. It affects the part of your throat called the "oropharynx." This includes the throat's side and back walls, and the soft palate. It also includes the back of your tongue and your tonsils.

Causes

What causes this cancer? It happens when the genetic code in one of the cells of your oropharynx becomes damaged. The damaged cell is a cancer cell. It may grow and divide uncontrollably, creating more cancer cells.

Risk factors

Your risk for this cancer is higher if you use alcohol or tobacco frequently. It's higher if your head or neck has been exposed to radiation. It's higher if you've had other cancers of the head or neck. And it's higher if you've been infected with the human papilloma virus. We call it "HPV."

Symptoms

What are the symptoms of oropharyngeal cancer? You may have a lasting sore throat. It may hurt when you swallow. You may feel a lump in your throat, mouth or neck. Your voice may sound different. You may have a white patch on your tongue or inside your mouth. And you may lose weight, or cough up blood.

Treatment

How do we treat it? Your options depend on your particular cancer, and what stage it's in. You may benefit from chemotherapy or radiation therapy. You may benefit from immunotherapy. You may need surgery. Your doctor will create a plan that's right for you.