



Assessing the Effects of Head and Neck Cancer: Impact on Human Health

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Description

Head and neck cancer, encompassing tumors in various regions like the mouth, throat, larynx, sinuses, and salivary glands, poses significant challenges to both physical health and overall well-being. Understanding its effects on human health is pivotal in addressing the complexities of this condition and improving patient outcomes. Head and neck cancer originates in the tissues and structures of the head and neck region. This category includes diverse cancers such as oral, throat (pharyngeal), laryngeal, nasal cavity, and salivary gland cancers. While tobacco and alcohol use are common risk factors, the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection has emerged as a significant cause, particularly for oropharyngeal cancers. Numerous factors contribute to the development of head and neck cancer.

Apart from tobacco and alcohol consumption, exposure to certain chemicals, prolonged sun exposure (for skin cancers in this region), poor oral hygiene, a diet low in fruits and vegetables, and HPV infection are among the risk factors associated with these cancers. However, in some cases, the exact cause remains unknown. The impact of head and neck cancer transcends physical health, affecting various aspects of an individual's life. Physically, it often presents as changes in voice, difficulty swallowing (Dysphagia), persistent sore throat, pain, or lumps in the neck. These symptoms not only cause discomfort but also affect nutritional intake, leading to weight loss and weakening the body's ability to fight the disease.

The location of the tumor significantly influences its impact on functionality. For instance, oral cavity cancers may affect speech,

chewing, and swallowing, impacting the ability to eat and communicate effectively. Similarly, cancers in the larynx can impair breathing and vocalization, drastically affecting daily activities and quality of life. Head and neck cancer often brings emotional challenges. Understanding with the diagnosis, undergoing treatment, and managing physical changes can lead to anxiety, depression, and a sense of isolation. The alteration in appearance due to surgery or treatment side effects may further affect self-esteem and social interactions.

Early detection is essential in improving outcomes for head and neck cancer. Symptoms may include persistent sore throat, difficulty swallowing, changes in voice, a lump or sore that doesn't heal, or a persistent cough. Diagnosis often involves a physical examination, imaging tests, biopsies, and endoscopic procedures to determine the location, stage, and type of cancer.

Treatment for head and neck cancer, including surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and targeted therapy, aims to eradicate the cancer while preserving function and appearance. However, these treatments can cause side effects like fatigue, nausea, hair loss, changes in taste, and difficulty swallowing, adding to the physical and emotional burden. The repercussions of head and neck cancer extend beyond the individual, affecting their social interactions and relationships. Speech difficulties, alterations in appearance, or challenges in eating may lead to social withdrawal, making it challenging to engage in activities previously enjoyed.

Rehabilitation plays a vital role in aiding recovery and improving quality of life post-treatment. Speech therapy, swallowing exercises, nutritional support, and counseling are integral parts of the comprehensive care plan. These interventions aim to restore function, enhance ability to survive, and support individuals in navigating life after cancer treatment. Survivorship after head and neck cancer treatment involves ongoing monitoring and support. Regular follow-ups, screenings, and support groups aid in managing potential long-term side effects, addressing emotional concerns, and promoting a healthier lifestyle.

Conclusion

Head and neck cancer's impact on human health is multifaceted, affecting physical, emotional, and social aspects of individual's lives. Understanding these effects enables healthcare professionals to provide holistic care, addressing not only the disease but also the diverse needs of patients. Through comprehensive support, rehabilitation, and ongoing studies into improved treatments, the aim remains to enhance survivorship and the overall well-being of those affected by this challenging condition.

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