



Discovery of Head and Neck Cancer and what to Expect

Being told that you may have head and neck cancer can be a frightening and overwhelming experience. Many people first notice symptoms such as a persistent ulcer in the mouth, a lump in the neck, a sore throat that does not improve, difficulty swallowing, hoarseness, or unexplained pain in the mouth, throat, or ear. In some cases, these symptoms are identified by a dentist, GP, or hospital specialist during a routine examination. Although these signs do not always mean cancer, they should always be investigated promptly.

If your doctor or dentist is concerned, you will usually be referred urgently to a specialist head and neck cancer team, often within two weeks. At your first hospital appointment, you may undergo a detailed examination of your mouth, throat, voice box, and neck. This may include a small camera (nasendoscopy) passed gently through the nose to allow the specialist to view areas that cannot be seen easily. Additional tests may include scans such as CT, MRI, or PET scans, as well as a biopsy, where a small tissue sample is taken to confirm the diagnosis.

Waiting for results can be one of the most difficult parts of the journey. It is normal to feel anxious, frightened, and uncertain about the future. During this period, many people find it helpful to bring a family member or friend to appointments, write down questions, and seek support from others who have been through a similar experience. Remember that you do not have to face this alone. The Swallows offers a 24/7 Support Line and Text Support Service, connecting patients and caregivers with people who truly understand the emotional impact of a possible diagnosis.

If cancer is confirmed, your case will be discussed by a multidisciplinary team (MDT) of specialists, which may include surgeons, oncologists, nurses, speech and language therapists, dietitians, and dentists. Together, they will develop a personalised treatment plan based on the type, location, and stage of the cancer, as well as your overall health and personal preferences. Treatment may involve surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, or a combination of these approaches.

Although a diagnosis of head and neck cancer can feel overwhelming, it is important to remember that there is a highly skilled team of professionals dedicated to your care and a supportive community ready to help you every step of the way. At The Swallows, we understand the challenges ahead and are here to provide practical information, emotional support, and reassurance throughout your journey.

24/7 Support Line

07504 725 059



24/7 Text Line

07830 929 400