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Sinus Problems, Cancer Stand in the Way of Healthy Valentine Lips
Nation's ENTs Urge Patients to Keep Lips Kissable

Alexandria, VA - What's a Valentine's Day without the kiss, and what's a kiss without your lips? This year, the nation's ear, nose, and throat doctors offer a reminder that healthy lips are the key to a memorable Valentine's Day experience; unhealthy ones can indicate serious health conditions.

"Healthy lips are certainly important on Valentine's Day," said Jordan S. Josephson, MD, member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS). "Dry, cracked lips, which aren't good for kissing, can be the result of sinus problems and nasal blockage from septal deviations and other causes. Those sinus problems can also result in snoring, which will take the romance right out of that Valentine's night."

Cracked lips can occur when a person with a blocked or stuffed nose is forced to breathe through his or her mouth. The flow of air decreases the moisture in the skin, and causes the lips to crack and peel. As a side effect of nasal congestion, stuffiness, or obstruction of nasal breathing, cracked lips add to the real discomfort of nasal congestion. The discomfort is one of the most common complaints seen by otolaryngologists.

"Cracked lips are just the tip of the iceberg when we discuss lip health," Dr. Josephson warned. "Perhaps most concerning is lip cancer, which can severely impact one's quality of life, and in some cases, lead to death."

Lip cancer usually appears as squamous cell cancer and/or malignant melanoma. Most squamous cell cancers occur on the lower lip, and can be caused by tobacco usage, UV exposure, or alcohol use. They may look like the more common, and less dangerous, basal cell cancers, and if caught early and properly treated, usually are not much more dangerous. If there is a sore on the lip or lower face that does not heal, consult a physician. Malignant melanoma classically produces dense blue-black or black discolorations of the skin. However, any mole that changes size, color, or begins to bleed may be trouble. A blackish spot on the lips, face, or neck, particularly if it changes size or shape, should be seen as soon as possible by a dermatologist, otolaryngologist/ear, nose, and throat surgeon, or at least by a primary care physician.

"Before you wind up with lip cancer, it might be a nice Valentine's present to your loved one to give up those cigarettes, cigars, and smokeless tobacco," Josephson added. At the very least, make sure to protect your lips from sun exposure with a UV-rated sunblock, just as you do the rest of your skin, he said.

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For more information on ear, nose, throat, head, and neck health information, visit www.entnet.org.

Reporters who wish to speak with an otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon about lip health should contact Matt Daigle at 1-703-535-3754, or at newsroom@entnet.org.

About the AAO-HNS

The American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery (www.entnet.org), one of the oldest medical associations in the nation, represents nearly 12,000 physicians and allied health professionals who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the ears, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck. The Academy serves its members by facilitating the advancement of the science and art of medicine related to otolaryngology and by representing the specialty in governmental and socioeconomic issues. The organization’s vision: “Empowering otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons to deliver the best patient care.”

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