

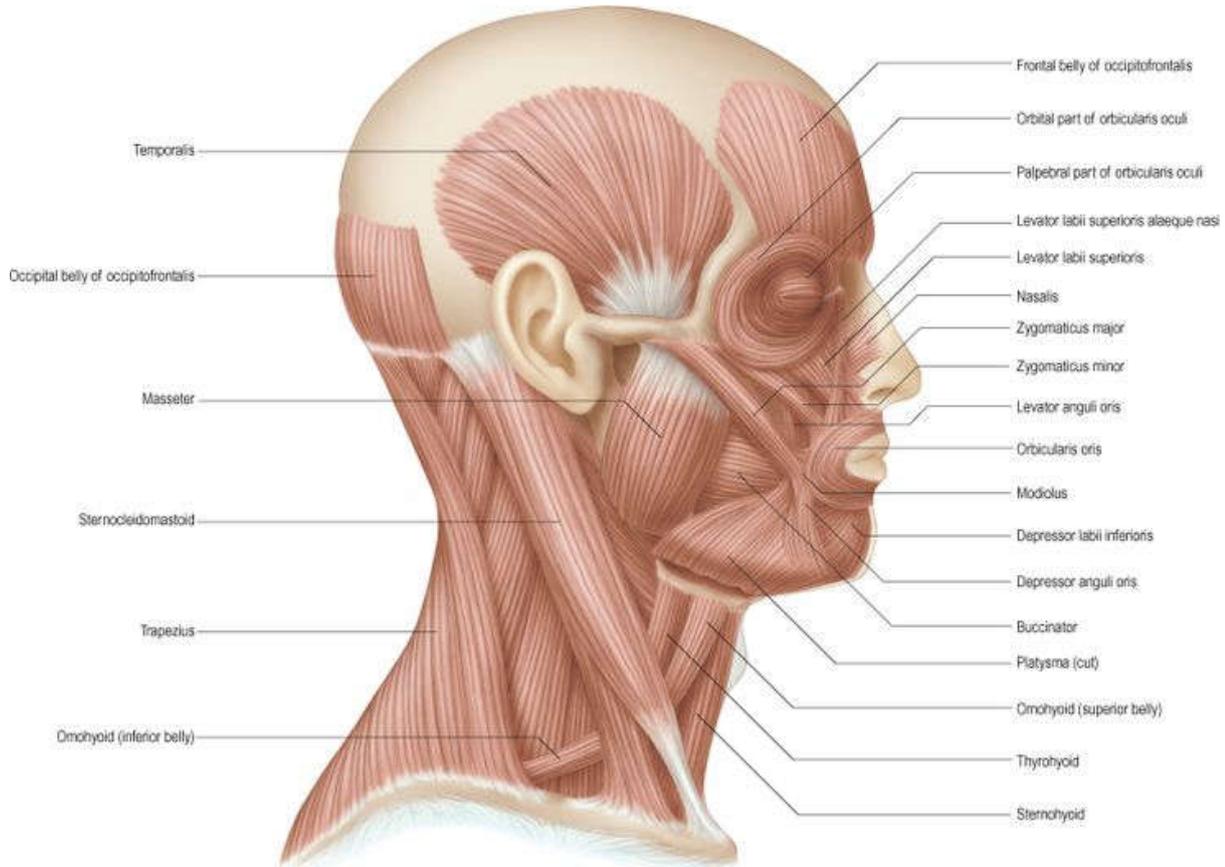


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Head and Neck Masses



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Anatomy

In this section, we mainly refer to masses in the head and neck region. There are several classification systems to describe the important areas of the head and neck. They are also important in terms of the lymph node groups they contain. The structures that form the head and neck often has a particular pattern of lymph node drainage, which helps us determine the origin of a head and neck mass.

The names of the different areas, are:

- Facial (there are several subdivisions).
- Pre-auricular.
- Retro-auricular.
- Occipital.
- Submental.
- Submandibular.
- Jugular (divided into different levels).
- Anterior neck.
- Supraclavicular.

Conditions of the Head and Neck

A patient, family member or a doctor may discover a **mass in the head or neck region**. It can be painful or painless, grow fast or grow slowly, all depending on the cause of the lesion.

The common causes differ significantly in adults and children. The most common causes in **younger patients** include:

- Swelling of the lymph nodes in the head and neck area can be in response to a **viral or bacterial upper airway infection** (like flu), a **systemic infection** (like tick fever or infective mononucleosis), or a reaction to a **local infection** (infected skin sore or an insect bite).
- **Congenital disorders** (condition that a person is born with) may cause a neck mass, typically longstanding. The most common are thyroglossal duct cysts, branchial cleft cysts, and dermoid or sebaceous cysts.
- **Inflammation/infection of the salivary glands** can cause painful enlargement along the sides of the face, or under the jaw. The most common (but not the only) virus associated with this clinical picture is the Mumps virus.
- **Malignancies** like lymphoma and leukemia should always be kept in mind as a possible cause for a head or neck mass in a child.



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- Sometimes the cause for lymph node swelling (without cancerous features) in a child remains **undetermined**.

The more common causes in **adults** include:

- **Cancerous masses** usually indicate that there is a cancerous lesion in close proximity to the mass (upper respiratory tract, digestive system, skin, orbit, etc.). Sometimes the original tumor can be located far from the mass (abdomen, breast, etc.). It is important that any mass should be investigated urgently by a specialist.
- The **thyroid gland** may enlarge in various disorders, including benign enlargement of the thyroid, subacute thyroiditis, and, less often, thyroid cancer.
- Enlargement of the **salivary glands** can be caused by infection, salivary gland stones, benign or malignant tumors/masses, or some auto-immune conditions such as Sjogren's syndrome.
- **Uncommon causes** include infections with organisms like TB (tuberculosis), HIV (Human Immunodeficiency virus), fungal organisms and granulomatous diseases (sarcoidosis or Wegener's granulomatosis).