

NEW PAIR OF SALIVARY GLANDS IN HUMANS DISCOVERED

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Blue arrow indicating the new gland | Photo Credit: <https://www.nki.nl/>

Researchers from the Netherlands Cancer Institute have discovered a new pair of salivary glands hidden between the nasal cavity and throat. They noticed the new gland while studying patients with prostate cancer using a new type of scan — a PSMA PET/CT scan

The scans of 100 patients and dissection studies on two cadavers were able to confirm the presence of this new gland.

The team proposed the name “tubarial glands” as it was found draped over the torus tubarius, the structure that supports the entrance of the auditory tube. The glands were about 3.9 centimeters in length on average.

“As far as we knew, the only salivary or mucous glands in the nasopharynx are microscopically small, and up to 1000 are evenly spread out throughout the mucosa. So, imagine our surprise when we found these,” Dr. Wouter V. Vogel from the Department of Nuclear Medicine at the Netherlands Cancer Institute said in a release.

The [paper published](#) by the team in *Radiotherapy and Oncology* noted that this identification “could help to explain and avoid radiation-induced side-effects” such as trouble during eating, swallowing, and speaking. The team analysed the data of 723 patients who had undergone radiation treatment and noted that there were more complications in patients who had more radiation delivered to these glands.

Scientists report previously-unrecognised anatomical structure in the human body

“For most patients, it should technically be possible to avoid delivering radiation to this newly discovered location of the salivary gland system in the same way we try to spare known glands,” Vogel concludes. “Our next step is to find out how we can best spare these new glands and in which patients. If we can do this, patients may experience less side effects which will benefit their overall quality of life after treatment.”

The paper adds that the classification of the tubarial glands was a matter of debate. It could be either a conglomerate of minor glands, a major gland, a separate organ, or a new part of an organ system.

As the glands have clinical relevance, they require a name that allows unique identification in daily clinical practice, writes the team.

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