

Home Care Instructions Following Dental Surgery

The removal of wisdom teeth is a serious surgical procedure. Post-operative care is very important. Unnecessary pain and the complications of infection and swelling can be minimized if the instructions are followed carefully.

Immediately Following Surgery

- The gauze pads placed over the surgical area should be kept in place for one hour. After this time, the gauze pads should be removed.
- Vigorous mouth rinsing or touching the wound area following surgery should be avoided. This may initiate bleeding by causing the blood clot that has formed to become dislodged.
- Take the non-narcotic pain medications as soon as you begin to feel the numbness dissipate. Only take the narcotic pain medication (if necessary) later in the day.
- Restrict your activities for the first two days and resume normal activities when you feel comfortable.
- Place ice packs on the sides of your face. Refer to the section on Swelling for specific instructions.

Bleeding

A certain amount of bleeding is to be expected following surgery. Slight bleeding, oozing, or redness in the saliva is not uncommon. Excessive bleeding may be controlled by first gently rinsing, then placing a gauze pad over the area firmly for 30 minutes. Repeat if necessary. If bleeding continues, bite on a moistened tea bag for 30 minutes. The tannic acid in the tea bag helps to form a clot by contracting blood vessels. To minimize further bleeding, sit upright, use ice packs, and avoid strenuous activity. If bleeding does not subside, call for further instructions.

Swelling

The swelling that is normally expected is usually proportional to the surgery involved. Swelling around the mouth, cheeks, and sides of the face is not uncommon. This is the body's normal reaction to surgery and eventual healing. The swelling may not become apparent until the day following surgery and will not reach its maximum until two to three days post-operatively. However, the swelling may be minimized by the use of ice packs over the area. The ice packs should be placed on the face for 20 minute intervals, followed by 20 minutes of rest. After 48 hours, ice has no beneficial effect. If swelling or jaw stiffness has persisted for several days, there is no cause for alarm. This is a normal reaction to surgery. Forty-eight hours following surgery, the application of moist heat to the sides of the face is beneficial in reducing the size of the swelling. Similarly, apply for 20 minute intervals. The ice pack placed on your jaw when left the office also works as a heat pack. To heat, place gel pack in microwave on full power for 15 seconds. Remove pack from the microwave and check for desired temperature. If not reached, reheat at 5 second intervals. NOTE: USE CAUTION. Overheating may cause burns or the pack to rupture. Place pack into the sleeve prior to use.

Pain

For mild-to-moderate pain, one to two tablets of Tylenol or Extra Strength Tylenol may be taken every three to four hours. Alternately, four 200 mg tablets of ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) may be taken every six to eight hours.

If pain returns before your next scheduled dose, take the narcotic tablets (usually hydrocodone or Tylenol with codeine) as directed. This medication will probably make you groggy and slow down your reflexes. Do not drive an automobile or work around machinery. Avoid alcoholic beverages. Pain or discomfort should begin subsiding three to four days following surgery. If pain increases, particularly between the 2nd and 4th day following surgery, it may require attention and you should call the office.

Diet

Begin by consuming thicker, cool liquids while still numb. After the numbness wears off, liquids and very soft foods should be consumed for three days. High calorie, high protein intake is recommended as well as maximizing nutrition. Do not use straws for two to three days. The sucking motion can cause bleeding by dislodging the blood clot. Drink plenty of liquids as you heal to prevent dehydration. You will feel better, have more strength, less discomfort, and heal faster if you continue to eat. Examples of soft foods include: mashed potatoes, oatmeal, smooth soups, scrambled eggs, creamy peanut butter off a spoon, mashed cottage cheese, mashed avocado, protein shakes, smoothies, ice cream, yogurt, and applesauce.

CAUTION: If you suddenly sit up or stand from a lying position, you may become dizzy. If you are lying down following surgery, make sure you sit for one minute before standing.

Keep Your Mouth Clean

No routine rinsing should be performed until the day following surgery. You may opt to rinse with tap or salt water if you choose, but it is not necessary. You can brush your teeth the night of surgery, but very gently around the surgical areas and rinse gently. Do not spit, but let the water fall into the sink.

Discoloration

In some cases, discoloration of the skin follows swelling. The development of black, blue, green, or yellow discoloration is due to blood spreading beneath the tissues. This is a normal post-operative occurrence which may occur two to three days post-operatively. Moist heat applied to the area may speed up the removal of the discoloration. Mild discoloration may last up to three weeks following surgery.

Antibiotics

If you have been placed on antibiotics, take the medicine as directed. Antibiotics will be given to help prevent infection. Discontinue antibiotic use only in the event of a rash or other unfavorable reaction. Call the office if you have any issues.

Other Complications

- If numbness of the lip, chin, or tongue occurs, there is no cause for alarm. As stated before surgery, this is usually temporary in nature. You should be aware that if your lip or tongue is numb, you could bite it and not feel the sensation. Call the office if you have questions.
- You should be careful going from the lying down position to standing. You may be dehydrated, and taking pain medications can make you dizzy. Therefore, you could get lightheaded when you suddenly stand up. Before standing, you should sit for one minute then get up.
- Occasionally, patients may feel hard projections in the mouth with their tongue. These are not roots, they are the bony walls that supported the tooth. These projections usually smooth out spontaneously. If not, they can be removed by your doctor.
- If the corners of your mouth are stretched, they may dry out and crack. Your lips should be kept moist with an ointment, Vaseline, or lip balm.
- Sore throats and pain are not uncommon. The muscles get swollen. The normal act of swallowing can then become painful. This will subside in a few days.
- Stiffness (trismus) of the jaw muscles may cause difficulty in opening your mouth for a few days following surgery. This is a normal post-operative event that will resolve in time.
- Do NOT smoke, use smokeless tobacco, or drink alcohol for 72 hours following tooth extractions. Smoke in particular will interfere with the healing process, promote bleeding, increase pain during recovery, and could cause a very painful condition known as a dry socket.
- Limit activity to a non-strenuous level for 48 hours.
- Women only: remember that oral antibiotics will negate the effects of oral contraceptives. For that reason, do not rely on birth control pills to prevent pregnancy until the following month.

Finally

Sutures may be placed in the area of surgery to minimize post-operative bleeding and to help healing. Sometimes they become dislodged. This is no cause for alarm. Just remove the suture from your mouth and discard it. Call the office if you have questions.

The pain and swelling should begin subsiding three to four days following surgery. If your post-operative pain or swelling worsens or unusual symptoms occur, call the office for instructions.

There will be a cavity where the tooth was removed. The cavity will gradually fill in with new tissue over the next month. In the meantime, the area should be kept clean especially after meals with salt-water rinses or very gently with a toothbrush.

Brushing your teeth is recommended – just be gentle at the surgical sites.

Your case is individual. No two mouths are alike. Do not accept well-intended advice from friends. Discuss your questions with those best able to effectively help you: the staff at The Dental Center.

Dr. Shannon Hingst and Staff