

After Surgery Instructions

Knoxville Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery

In order to health promptly with a minimum amount of discomfort and decreased chances of infection, it is necessary to devote detailed care to your body. Please read these instructions every day until you are seen for your postoperative appointment as instructions change daily, and this will serve as a reminder on a daily basis as to what to do in regards to your postoperative care.

SWELLING

Swelling of injured tissues is the body's normal response to surgery. This can be minimized with the application of cold packs immediately after surgery for approximately 48 hours. A reusable facial ice bandage may be provided or you may fill Ziploc bags with ice cubes, fold it within a moist towel and apply to the race for approximately 20 minutes on, 10 minutes off.

Starting 4 days after surgery, moist heat with gentle massage to the outside of your face in the areas of swelling can help the swelling subside. Moist heat promotes healing and will help resolve any muscle spasm you might be experiencing.

BLEEDING

Bleeding from bone takes several hours to stop completely. It is normal to ooze some blood from the surgical area for up to 24 hours and then off and on for three days. If bleeding occurs, it is best controlled by pressure. Roll gauze into a tube or square and lightly moisten it, then place it carefully between the jaws behind the teeth so that it compresses the surgical site. Do not place gauze in the cheeks. It must press on the surgery site. The gauze pad should be removed after approximately one hour and the wound reevaluated. If oozing continues, replace the gauze after lightly moistening it. Sit quietly without spitting or talking. Moving the jaw, smoking, spitting, or changing the gauze too often merely dislodges the blood clot so that a new one must be formed. You might also try a moist tea bag wrapped in a moist gauze sponge placed over the surgical site with firm, instant pressure for another 60 minutes. If you have significant bleeding, call our office.

PAIN:

Take the pain pills as prescribed approximately two hours after surgery. If you can tolerate ibuprofen, take this as prescribed with a glass of water. This will usually help keep you comfortable in the presence of mild pain. After taking a prescribed narcotic, do not drive or operate dangerous machinery because your sense and reflexes will be diminished. Avoid taking the pain pill on an empty stomach. If nausea does occur, sip cold, clear liquids (Coke, Sprite, water, tea, Gatorade, etc). Let carbonated drinks "flatten out" somewhat prior to drinking. An anti-nausea suppository can be prescribed if nausea persists. Surgery of the jaw involves cutting through muscle. In its repair, muscle frequently undergoes spasm. This spasm can be painful and is not usually relieved by pain pills. However, the application of moist heat (starting 4 days after surgery) with gently massage can offer great benefits in the reduction of muscle spasm and its associated pain.

ORAL HYGIENE

It is imperative to maintain a clean mouth during the healing period. To not do so invites infection by way of accumulation of food and old blood around the wounds. Begin gently brushing your teeth and rinse the surgical wounds with warm salt water after every meal, starting the day after surgery. You must rinse gently so that you do not rinse out the blood clot. Softening the toothbrush under hot water will allow you to brush the teeth adjacent to the surgery site, but care must be taken not to aggressively brush the surgical wound.

STRETCH ABRASIONS & FEVER BLISTERS

When the surgery is difficult, it is necessary to retract the lips firmly, resulting in stretch abrasions in the corners of the mouth. These heal without scarring, but can be helped by the constant application of petroleum ointment. Fever blisters can occur with even the mildest retraction and should be coated with petroleum ointment to prevent drying of these ulcers.

JAW STIFFNESS (TRISMUS)

The inability to move the jaw after intra-oral surgery is a common occurrence. It is usually a direct result of the swelling discussed previously. Exercise by opening and closing the gently stretching of the jaw is an aid to relaxing the muscles involved. Again, moist heat with massage also benefits the patient.

REST

Although strict bed rest is not required, excessive physical exercise, especially lifting, bending over, or straining should be avoided for the first 3-4 days after surgery. Sleeping elevated (e.g. 2-3 pillows) might help avoid additional swelling.

TOBACCO & ALCOHOL

Smoking greatly increases the changes of infection. This may lead to dry socket and should be avoided. Alcoholic beverages should be avoided for at least 48 hours after surgery and never should be taken in association with a narcotic pain pill. Both of these may lead to irritation of the surgical site, which may cause severe pain and other possible complications.

DRY SOCKET

After a tooth is removed, a "hole" or socket is left in the jaw bone where the roots of the tooth used to be present. Normal healing requires the formation and continued presence of a blood clot in that hole. If this clot does not form or dissolves prematurely then dull to throbbing pain in the jaw or pain radiating to the ear may occur. This pain usually starts to increase the third to seventh day after the tooth was removed.

You can decrease the chances of a dry socket by avoiding smoking for 3 days after surgery; no alcoholic beverages for 5 days after surgery; and avoiding heavy lifting, jogging, tennis or other physical activities. However, these may all be avoided and dry socket may still develop.

A dry socket is treated by placing a gauze dressing, in the socket to cover the exposed bone and promote new tissue growth. The pain should improve within an hour after treatment. The dressing will be removed or replaced as needed. If pain should return prior to your scheduled appointment, call or come in to the office to have the dressing replaced if necessary. Usually one or two dressing changes will keep you comfortable until normal healing has taken place.

PROBLEMS OR QUESTIONS

Please call us if you have a question or problem. Our concern for you does not stop after the surgery is completed. Someone is available 24 hours a day, and we will be happy to return your call within a reasonable amount of time to assist you with any questions or concerns.