



# Orthognathic surgery: aftercare advice

Information for patients from the Department of Maxillo Facial Surgery and Orthodontics



Image courtesy of Dolphin Imaging and Management Solutions [www.dolphinimaging.com](http://www.dolphinimaging.com)

After extensive surgery to correct the position of your jaws, you can expect to feel some discomfort for a few days. Your face will feel numb, swollen, and tight, your jaws will feel stiff and you will find that you cannot open your mouth wide. You may also have difficulty breathing through your nose and find swallowing difficult due to a sore throat. This leaflet will give you some tips to help you through your recovery.

## Key points

- Expect swelling and bruising
- Keep to a soft diet but make sure you get enough nutrition
- Take regular painkillers
- Keep your mouth and teeth clean



## Swelling and bruising

Swelling is often worst on the third day after your surgery. Bruising often appears after three or four days and can spread from your face down into your neck and chest. This largely settles over seven to 10 days but swelling may take several weeks.

The swelling can be helped by using cold compresses. Cold compresses can be made by wrapping ice in a small towel, filling a plastic bag with ice, or simply using a large bag of frozen vegetables. The compress should then be placed over the swollen area on a regular basis.

**Caution:** ice can cause burns, so do not put it directly on your skin, always use a towel. Protect sensitive skin with baby oil.

There are also cold pads available to buy, which may be used according to manufacturer's guidelines.

Sleeping in a more upright position will also help reduce the swelling.

## Diet

Keep to a sensible diet. To start with you may only be able to have liquids but within a few days you should be able to manage a soft diet. This should gradually build up to a normal diet over a few weeks. Most people find that pain is the main problem that stops them from eating and drinking so it is important to take your pain relief at regular intervals as prescribed.

Do make sure that you take in enough nutrients and calories even with a soft diet. This means you may benefit from having a blender or may need to cook your food for longer until it is soft. The following tips will help you choose foods which are easier to eat.

- Choose naturally soft foods that are easy to chew
- Take smaller mouthfuls
- Eat little and often; try having five to six small meals and snacks each day
- Do not be afraid to use ready meals and desserts if you feel tired
- Avoid acidic and spicy foods
- Use butter, cream, mayonnaise, sauces, and gravies to moisten foods
- Sip drinks at mealtimes
- Choose full fat and high sugar foods if you find that you are losing weight
- 'Build Up' and 'Complan' are fortified drinks that are available to buy at supermarkets and chemists and can be used to supplement your diet.

Most importantly, make sure you keep hydrated with a minimum of eight glasses of water a day.

## Painkillers and antibiotics

Make sure that you take painkillers regularly (according to manufacturer's instructions) to keep your pain at a minimum level. It is helpful to take paracetamol/co-codamol and ibuprofen alternately throughout the day. For example if you take paracetamol at 12pm, take ibuprofen at 3pm and paracetamol again at 6pm and so on. The antibiotics given need to be taken regularly for the number of days advised by your doctor.

## Cleaning your teeth

It is very important that you keep your teeth clean as this helps prevent infection at the site of your surgery.

Use Chlorhexidine **mouthwash** regularly after each meal. This mouthwash does increase the uptake of stains by teeth, so you should avoid coloured foods for example tea and coffee, if using it for more than two weeks.

Regular warm **salt-water rinses** also help to keep your mouth clean. Most importantly, you need to **brush your teeth** twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste. This will be tricky, so a brush with a smaller head (or baby brush) will help you get to the difficult places without stretching your mouth too wide.



Example of a small head toothbrush



Examples of different sizes of interdental toothbrushes

## Elastics

Should the elastics in your mouth break and/or come loose, they will need to be replaced in the same position as shown to you in hospital. You can use tweezers to help place the elastics in difficult-to-reach places.

## Numbness and drooling

The combination of numb lips and difficulty swallowing may cause you to drool. This is common and will make your lips and skin dry. Vaseline or lip-balm will help to prevent cracked and sore lips.

## Bleeding

There should not be any bleeding in your mouth by the time you are discharged from hospital. However if it does happen, apply pressure on the area for at least 10 minutes with a rolled up damp swab or handkerchief. If bleeding continues, contact us using the number provided on the next page.

## Soreness or wires

You may find that the metal brackets or wire is causing soreness to your cheek or lip due to swelling. If this happens, simply roll a piece of orthodontic wax into a ball, and place this on the brackets or the ends of wires, where it is cutting into your cheek or lip.

## Will I need a follow-up appointment?

You should have a review appointment with the orthodontic consultant within two weeks of discharge from the hospital. Please contact us using the numbers below if this is not arranged.

## Further information

If you have any further enquiries, please contact the **Maxillo Facial Department at William Harvey Hospital** on telephone 01233 61 60 45 between 9am and 5pm.

For out of hours help, ring **Rotary Ward** on 01233 61 62 34 or ring 01233 63 33 31 and ask switchboard for the maxillo facial on-call doctor.

**This leaflet has been produced with and for patients**

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

**Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments** please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email [ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital.** Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

**Further patient leaflets** are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site [www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation](http://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation)

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