

Post-Operative Instructions after Incision And Drainage of a Dental Infection (Abscess)

If you presented to your dentist with an infection in your tooth which formed a pocket of pus (a collection of bacteria and infection fighting cells also known as an “abscess”), your dentist may have had to drain the infection in order to prevent worsening of the infection, reduce your pain, and help you to better heal. This handout will provide you important information to consider following the procedure.

Please note that you will likely need additional dental work on the abscessed tooth in addition to draining the infection such as a root canal or removal of the tooth (extraction). Without treatment to remove the source of the infection, you will be at risk of a recurrent and possibly worse infection. Please get your tooth treated as soon as possible. **Dental infections may become life threatening if not treated promptly.**

What can I expect after the drainage procedure?

Bleeding and fluid drainage: It is normal for your surgery site to ooze with blood along with drainage fluid from the infection. **Apply pressure with gauze to stop bleeding and alert your dentist if you have more than mild oozing.**

Drain: You may have a drain placed to help get rid of the infection. It is important to leave this drain in place until removed by your dentist. This drain prevents the gums from closing too early and assists with removal of the infected fluid. Follow-up with your dentist in the next day or two to make sure that your infection is improving and so that the drain may be removed.

What medications do I need to take?

Antibiotics: Take your antibiotics as prescribed **until they are gone**, even if your swelling has gone down. Stopping your antibiotics too early may increase your risk of having the infection return. Alert your dentist if you have any difficulty obtaining your prescription, taking your prescription as directed, or if you **have a reaction** to the medications.

Pain medications: Your dentist will likely recommend use of over-the-counter ibuprofen and Tylenol if you are able to take these medications. Alternating between ibuprofen and Tylenol every three hours for the first day after the procedure may help reduce discomfort and swelling. Taking pain medications on a set schedule for the first day rather than as needed when pain levels are increased may make discomfort more manageable. You may then take the medications as needed. Make sure to take pain medications with food and water.

What are my diet instructions?

Stick with soft foods and avoid crunchy foods that may get stuck in your surgery site or dislodge the drain. Avoid foods that are too hot as this may promote bleeding.

Additional self care tips:

1. Apply warm compress to the outside of your face. Cold icepacks may delay healing from infections and should be avoided.
2. Gently massage the outside of your face where you may have swelling. This may help the infection drain and speed your healing. Swelling may increase for a few days after your surgery before getting better.
3. Consider sleeping with your head elevated which may help reduce swelling.
4. Brush all of your teeth twice per day with a soft toothbrush, making sure to keep your mouth as clean as possible.

5. Starting one day after surgery- gently rinse your mouth with warm, salt-water (1/2 tsp of salt in 8 oz warm water) twice per day. Do not swish or swish gently. Swishing vigorously may promote bleeding or displacement of the drain.
6. If you smoke, avoid smoking for as long as possible following surgery. The use of tobacco delays healing and may lead to other complications including oral cancer. We strongly recommend avoiding tobacco products. Please ask your provider for assistance and resources to help you quit! Your dental team would love to support you.

When should I call my dentist?

Call your dentist immediately if:

1. Your symptoms get worse.
 - If your symptoms include difficulty breathing or swallowing due to swelling, **go to the Emergency Room immediately.**
2. Your mouth is bleeding and unable to be stopped with gauze pressure.
3. You cannot eat or drink due to pain or swelling.
4. Your drain has moved, come loose or dislodged completely.
5. You have any other questions or concerns about your condition or care.

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