

Post-Maxillectomy Oral Care Instructions

What is a maxillectomy?

A maxillectomy/ palatectomy is a surgical procedure that removes a portion of your upper jaw, known as your “maxilla.” This surgery may be performed in order to remove an abnormal growth, or a “tumor,” that may be benign (not cancerous) or malignant (cancerous).

How should I care for my mouth after a maxillectomy?

After a maxillectomy/ palatectomy, you may receive an "obturator." An obturator is a prosthesis that restores the site after surgery and aids in the function of speaking, chewing, and/or swallowing. More information on obturators may be found in the handout: *Maxillary Prosthesis (Obturator) Care Instructions*. Access is at <https://michmed.org/xonOp>.

This handout will review changes to your oral hygiene care after your surgery.

What special changes should I make to keep my mouth clean after a maxillectomy?

When part of your maxilla is removed, you may have an opening from your mouth into your maxillary sinus. Your sinus contains mucus which may collect and should be removed, daily, in order to prevent hardening. If the mucus is allowed to harden, removal may be more difficult and result in heavy bleeding. To prevent this from happening, follow the instructions below to thin the mucus and remove the excess mucus build up:

- Use saline nasal (nose) rinses a few times per week or once daily in order to help thin mucus.
- Use a diluted mixture of Alkalol® (an over-the-counter nasal rinse) a few times per week or once daily in order to help thin mucus and moisturize the nasal tissues.
- Use an oral care swab, such as a Toothett®. Dip the swab in **alcohol-free** Chlorhexidine gluconate 0.12% mouthwash (a prescription). Gently remove mucus that has collected near your oral cavity from your sinus at least once per day.
- Do not attempt to remove dried mucus if it is stuck to tissues, as this could cause trauma and bleeding.

If you have an obturator:

- Remove the prosthesis at night, **unless** your provider told you specifically not to remove your obturator.
- Clean the obturator over 4-5 inches of water in a basin or sink to avoid damage to the obturator should it drop.
- Store the obturator in a covered container with or without denture cleaner when not in use.

In addition to the special hygiene instructions, continue to:

- Brush your teeth at least twice per day for 2 minutes using a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss between all of your teeth at least once per day.
- Brush your tongue with a tongue scraper or brush 1-2 times per day.

What should I know if I plan to receive radiation or have received radiation following my maxillectomy?

A few changes you may notice during and after radiation include dry mouth, taste changes, and an increased risk for tooth decay and infections in your mouth. Additional recommendations to help you take care of your mouth during and after radiation therapy may be found in the handout *Caring for Your Mouth during and after Radiation Therapy*. Access at <https://michmed.org/8R5aZ>.

Who should I call if I have questions?

- Call Hospital Dentistry at (734) 936-5950, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
- After hours and on weekends, call Hospital Paging at (734) 936-6267 and ask for the dentistry resident on call if your question or concern is of an urgent nature.

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