



Oral Cyst and Tumors

What are oral cysts and tumors?

Oral cysts and tumors are relatively rare lesions (sores) that develop in the jawbone or the soft tissues in the mouth and face. These typically include:

- cysts (sacs possibly filled with fluid)
- benign (non-cancerous) tumors (lumps of skin that do not resemble the skin around them) that may be slow or fast growing
- malignant (cancerous) tumors

Our Oral and Maxillofacial surgeons evaluate, diagnose and treat cysts and tumors in and around the head and neck. This includes lesions in the jaw bones, salivary glands, lips, cheeks, and teeth.

What is an oral cyst?

A cyst is an abnormal sac or pocket in bone or soft tissues which may contain fluid. There are many different kinds of cysts. The most important reason for removing a cyst is that over time they increase in size and may become harmful. Very large cysts may weaken the lower jaw bone to the point where it can break more easily. Teeth beside a large cyst may become loose and move around. In some cases, cysts may destroy the tooth structure - this is called root resorption.

What is an oral tumor?

A tumor is a solid or semi-solid mass within bone or soft tissue that is made of cells that are different than cells usually found in that location. There are several types of soft-tissue tumors which may be found on the lips, cheeks, tongue, mouth floor (under the tongue), and gums. Before starting treatment for a tumor, you will have a biopsy. A biopsy is a surgery that removes part of

the tumor and helps the doctor to determine if the tumor is benign or malignant and what would be the best treatment for it. Different tumors require different types of treatment ranging from minimally invasive procedures to more extensive surgery. It is very important to diagnose the tumor correctly with a biopsy prior to starting treatment.

How do I know if I have an oral cyst or tumor?

Facial and jaw cysts and tumors often do not have any symptoms. Your doctor or dentist may discover them during regular check-ups or x-rays. When they do cause symptoms, they usually look like a non-painful bump or lump. These cysts and tumors are often benign (not cancer), but all tumors in the head and neck must be examined by our surgeons as soon as possible.

After a surgeon examines the cyst or tumor, we will often recommend a panorex x-ray (an x-ray of your mouth and jaw), CT scans (an X-ray showing the inside of a body part), or an MRI of your head (test that uses a strong magnet in order to create detailed images of organs and tissues within the body) to determine what kind of treatment you need.

What type of treatment do I need for my cyst or tumor?

Your treatment will depend on whether your cyst or tumor is benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer). Our oral and maxillofacial surgeons use different types of surgical techniques to remove tumors and cysts. In some cases, we work together with other specialists within the University of Michigan to create a personal treatment plan that is tailored to your needs.

What treatment options are available?

Your treatment options vary depending on your symptoms, the type of cyst or tumor you have, and its stage of growth. In rare cases the tumors or cysts can be treated only with medications, but most cases usually require surgery.

Here is a description of some common treatments:

Excisional biopsy: Surgery to remove the entire abnormality or area of interest

There are four options for obtaining a tissue sample:

1. **Frozen section biopsy:** A pathologist (doctor who specializes in detecting changes caused by disease in tissues and body fluids) examines the removed tissue during surgery and reports a diagnosis within a few minutes. The surgeon uses this information to decide the how much tissue needs to be to removed.
2. **Enucleation:** The removal of the tumor or cyst so that it comes out clean and whole. This reduces the chances of it coming back.
3. **Marsupialization:** Cutting out a hole (a “window”) in the wall of the cyst so that it will stay open and drain. A drain may be placed to direct the fluid from the cyst to flow into the mouth. The only portion of the cyst that is removed is the piece to make the window. This process helps shrink the cyst and fill in the bone in your jaw.
4. **Surgical excision (removal) with margins:** Surgical excision refers to the actual removal of the cyst or tumor. At times, based on the type of cyst or tumor you have, we may also need to remove the tissue that surrounds the cyst or tumor (the margins). A pathologist will examine the margins to ensure that the entire cyst or tumor was removed.

Bone grafting Allogenic bone grafts are bones taken from a deceased person that have been carefully evaluated to make sure they are a safe match for you. This bone is then processed using several sterilization techniques and placed over the hole left by the tumor or cyst. This allows bone from the surrounding bony walls to grow on the graft and fill the hole.

What are the possible risks and complications of having an oral cyst or tumor removed?

Overall, surgery on jaw cysts and tumors is safe when done by a well-trained, experienced surgeon in a center that performs many similar surgeries. Any surgery has the possibility for risks and complications. Your surgeon will discuss these in detail after they decide on the type of surgery that best fits your needs.

What can I expect for recovery after removal of my oral cyst or tumor?

- **Hospital stay:** Patients can generally expect to go home after they recover from anesthesia (the medication that put you sleep during surgery). In some cases, patients may need to stay overnight at the hospital depending on the extent of the surgery.
- **Return to work/school:** We usually advise taking between 2 days to 2 weeks off before returning to work or school. This period may be shorter or longer based on the type of surgery you had. It takes at least 6 weeks for initial healing of your jaw.
- **Physical activity:** You can resume light physical exercise as soon as you feel able following your surgery. **You must not participate** in any exercise or sports that may involve hitting your jaw. This includes all contact sports. Do not clench or stress your jaw muscles with heavy lifting more than 10 pounds.
- **Diet:** For the first 2 weeks after surgery you will follow a soft diet. Nutritional supplements such as Ensure[®] are helpful. On your 2-week follow-up appointment we will explain what type of diet you will transition to at that time. This depends of the type and extent of surgery. After the initial 2 weeks, you may use a straw to eat.

- **Pain control:** Your doctor may prescribe anti-inflammatory or opioid pain medications to help control pain or discomfort following surgery.
- **Swelling:** Swelling is a normal side-effect of surgery but the degree varies between individuals. You can expect to have the most swelling between days 3-5 after your surgery.
- **Scarring:** Most of this type of surgery is carried out inside the mouth, which means no obvious scars. In some cases, very small incisions may be placed on the outside of your mouth on your face.

When will I need to follow up with my surgeon?

We will follow up with you about 2 weeks after your surgery. We will check to make sure you are healing properly. At this appointment we will explain when you need to follow up with us again. The type of cyst or tumor you had will determine future follow-up and treatment.

Who can I contact with additional questions about my surgery?

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