Oral and Maxillofacial

Post operative advice following orthognathic jaw surgery

Swelling
Swelling of the face is to be expected after jaw surgery. This will be at its peak two to three days after the procedure. Over the subsequent two weeks it will reduce steadily but will be noticeable to close family/friends up to four or even six weeks later. Due to swelling you are likely to find that you won’t be able to open your mouth as wide as normal and your jaws and muscles around the face may ache.

Your lips may swell up due to surgery and cause the braces to rub, if this happens please ask the clinic to provide some relief wax if you don’t already have some at home.

Pain control
You will be advised to take paracetamol and anti-inflammatory medication (such as ibuprofen, if you can take this) to help control your pain. The swelling will be uncomfortable and tight but should be manageable and will settle with time.

You may have a sore throat after surgery because of the tube that is used to help you breathe during the operation, again this settles soon after surgery.

Diet
It is very important that you stick to a very soft diet following your surgery; this will be the case for six weeks, as this is how long it takes for your bones to start to heal. Remember, you have broken jaw(s) so won’t be able to chew with them. We advise that you should be liquidising food for the first two weeks, so it is the same consistency as soup. Eating little and often is often the best way to maintain your nutrition, as opposed to three large meals which you may find difficult. After two weeks you can begin to incorporate softer foods, such as scrambled egg/spaghetti and so on. We have soft diet leaflets if you would like some inspiration.

Your lips and the skin around your mouth are likely to be sore; this can be helped with good hydration and you can apply Vaseline to ease discomfort.

Bleeding
It is normal to be able to taste blood in your mouth after surgery and although it will be diluted by your saliva it will still look dramatic. As long as there is no constant oozing from any areas there is nothing you need to do.

Upper jaw surgery causes bleeding in/around the inside of your nose, this may feel blocked which is normal and you may notice dried or clotted blood from your nose, which will settle. It is normal to suffer nose bleeds after upper jaw surgery for several days. These can be managed with a nasal bolster (ask on the ward after your surgery if you need one of these).
Numbness
As we will have explained before the surgery, you will have some numbness or altered sensation; your top lip and palate (these tend to recover quickly), and your lower lip, chin, teeth and tongue. The lower lip and chin altered sensation may take up to a year or more to recover and may not be complete.

Oral care
It is very important to keep the mouth scrupulously clean after surgery to promote better healing and prevent any infection. You should start oral care in hospital and continue following discharge.

You will be swollen and sore so it’s understandable that cleaning your mouth will be difficult. Use a small headed ‘baby’ tooth brush to clean the teeth twice a day. Rinse your mouth with warm salty water five times per day for five minutes at a time for at least five days (five, five and five). In addition, you should use chlorhexidine mouthwash two or three times each day. (Chlorhexidine can stain the teeth after long term use).

Elastics
Your muscles will be used to your old bite, so after we have moved your jaw(s) placing elastics can help guide them to bring your teeth together properly. They will go from your upper to your lower braces and will need to be replaced if they come off or become stretched. It may make eating more difficult but you will be on a soft, sloppy diet whilst you are wearing them and most patients get used to them quickly.

Appointments
You will have an orthodontic appointment soon after your surgery and follow up appointments from then onwards. Here we will check how your bite is settling in, your oral hygiene and elastics.

Smoking
We recommend avoidance of smoking as it impairs wound healing and is associated with infection.

If you have problems or simply require advice, you may contact:
Clinic 8 (in office hours) - 01223 216415 or 216412
Ward m5 (out of hours) - 01223 348525 or 348527
We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

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