

A Few Simple Guidelines

Tooth extraction is a surgical procedure. It is natural that changes will occur in your mouth afterward. Your dentist may give you instructions to follow after the extraction, and it's important to talk to your dentist if you have any questions or problems. Here are some general guidelines to help promote healing, prevent complications, and make you more comfortable.



Anesthetics

The length of time you experience numbness varies, depending on the type and amount of anesthetic you've received and the area that was anesthetized. While your mouth is numb, you'll want to be careful not to bite your cheek, lip or tongue. For this reason, it is important that you do not have any foods that require chewing while your mouth is numb. If you have liquid foods, it is very important that you do not drink through a straw. The sucking action that occurs when a straw is used may loosen the blood clot and prevent proper healing. The numbness should subside within a few hours. If it doesn't, contact your dentist.

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Next Appointment (Date/Time)

Special Instructions

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• DENTAL TREATMENT

Tooth Extraction

Post-Operative Instructions

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Bleeding

Your dentist may place a gauze pack on the extraction site to limit bleeding and confine the blood while clotting takes place. This gauze pack should be left in place for 30 to 45 minutes after you leave the dentist's office. Do not chew on the pack. There may be some bleeding or oozing after the pack is removed. If so, follow this procedure:

- Fold a piece of clean gauze into a pad thick enough to bite on. Dampen the pad with clean, warm water and place it directly on the extraction site.
- Apply moderate pressure by closing the teeth firmly over the pad. Maintain this pressure for about 30 minutes. If the pad becomes soaked with blood, replace it with a clean one as necessary.
- Do not suck on the extraction site or disturb it with your tongue.
- A slight amount of blood may leak from the extraction site until a clot forms. However, if heavy bleeding continues, call your dentist. (Remember, though, that a little bit of blood mixed with a lot of saliva can look like a lot of bleeding.)

The Blood Clot

After an extraction, a blood clot forms in the tooth socket. This clot is an important part of the normal healing process. You should avoid activities that might disturb the clot. Here's how to protect it:

- Do not smoke, or rinse your mouth vigorously, or drink through a straw for 24 hours. These activities create suction in the mouth, which could dislodge the clot and delay healing.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages or mouthwash containing alcohol for 24 hours.
- Do not clean the teeth next to the healing tooth socket for the rest of the day. You should, however, brush and floss your other teeth thoroughly. Gently rinse your mouth afterward.
- Limit strenuous activity for 24 hours after the extraction. This will reduce bleeding and help the blood clot to form.
- Sometimes the blood clot does not form in the first day or two after the extraction, or it forms but breaks down for some reason. The result is called osteitis or dry socket. This can be very painful and should be reported to your dentist. A dressing may be placed in the socket to protect it until the socket heals and to reduce any pain.

Cleaning Your Mouth

Do not clean the teeth next to the healing tooth socket for the rest of the day. You should, however, brush and floss your other teeth thoroughly, and begin cleaning the teeth next to the healing tooth socket the next day. The tongue should also be brushed. This will help eliminate the bad breath and unpleasant taste that are common after an extraction.

The day after the extraction, gently rinse your mouth with warm salt water (half a teaspoon salt in an 8 oz. glass of warm water) after meals to keep food particles out of the extraction site. But remember not to rinse your mouth vigorously, as this may dislodge the blood clot. If you have hypertension, discuss with your dentist whether you should rinse with salt water. Avoid using a mouthrinse or mouthwash during this early healing period unless your dentist advises you to do so.

When choosing oral hygiene products, look for those that carry the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance — a sign that a product has met ADA criteria for safety and effectiveness.



Talk to your dentist if you have any questions about tooth extraction.

Medication

If your dentist has prescribed medication to control pain and prevent infection, use it only as directed. If the pain medication prescribed does not seem to work for you, do not increase the number of doses you take or decrease the interval between doses. Call your dentist if you have any difficulties with the medication.

Swelling and Pain

After a tooth is removed, you may have some discomfort and notice some swelling. You can help reduce swelling and pain by applying cold compresses to your face as directed by your dentist. An ice bag or cold, moist cloth can be used periodically. Your dentist may give you specific instructions on how long and how often to use a cold compress. Your dentist may also give you a cold pack to use on your way home from the office. If you have prolonged or severe pain, swelling, bleeding, fever, nausea or vomiting, call your dentist immediately. If you cannot reach your dentist, go to a hospital emergency room.

Diet

After the extraction, drink lots of liquids and eat soft, nutritious foods. Avoid hot liquids and alcoholic beverages. Do not use a straw. Begin eating solid foods the next day or as soon as you can chew comfortably. For the first few days, try to chew food on the side opposite the extraction site. When it feels comfortable, you could resume chewing on both sides of your mouth.

Follow-Up

If you have sutures that require removal, your dentist will instruct you when to return to the office.