

Tooth Extractions: Post-Operative Instructions

If you have just had a tooth/teeth extracted, the following information will help. The initial healing period typically takes from 1-2 weeks, gum tissue takes about 3-4 weeks to heal and complete healing of the bone will take months. Some discomfort, bleeding and swelling can be expected in the next 24 to 48 hours as your mouth heals. You can promote faster healing and avoid complications by following the following instructions:

- 1. Do not disturb the wound.** In doing so you may invite irritation, infection and/or bleeding. The healing process begins immediately after surgery as your body sends blood to nourish the tooth socket. Simple pressure from a piece of gauze is usually all that is needed to control the bleeding and to help a blood clot to form in the socket. If sutures are used, they will typically dissolve in 5-7 days on their own. If longer lasting sutures are used intentionally for specific reasons, your dentist will advise you of their specific duration. Be sure to consult with your dentist if bleeding persists.
- 2. Do not use tobacco products for 48-72 hours after tooth extractions.** Smoke can interfere with the healing process, promote bleeding, and can cause a very painful situation known as "dry socket." Continuing to smoke during these first few days will slow healing and soft tissue will not be able to begin to fill in the socket to form the blood clot needed for healthy healing. Smoking can also interfere with the bone that surrounds the socket resulting in slowing its process of filling in the socket.
- 3. Bleeding.** When you leave the office, you will be given verbal instructions regarding the control of post-operative bleeding. A rolled up gauze pad will be placed on the extraction site and you may be asked to change this dressing every 20 minutes or so depending on the amount of bleeding that is occurring. It is normal for some blood to ooze from the area of surgery for 8-12 hours. We will also give you a package of gauze to take with you to use at home if the bleeding should continue. Should you need to use the gauze at home, remember to roll it into a ball large enough to cover the wound. Hold firmly in place, by biting or with finger pressure, for about 30-60 minutes. Ensure the pressure is being directed right onto the wound rather than the adjacent teeth. This pressure helps reduce bleeding and permits a clot to form in the tooth socket. If bleeding still continues, moisten a tea bag with water and fold it in half and bite down on it for 30 minutes.
- 4. Swelling.** Swelling may occur after dental extraction, and this is expected to peak at around 3 days. To minimize swelling, apply an ice pack or a cold towel to the outside of your face in the area of the extraction during the first 12 to 24 hours. Apply alternately, 10-20 minutes on then 10-20 minutes off, for an hour or longer if necessary. If a new swelling develops or if the swelling becomes significantly worse after 3-4 days, there may be an infection developing and you should contact your dentist for evaluation.
- 5. Diet.** For the first 24-48 hours, you should maintain a diet of soft foods, such as Jell-O, pudding, yogurt, mashed potatoes, soups, etc. Food that crumbles such as potato chips, popcorn, crackers, cookies, etc. should be avoided. When the numbness has worn off you may eat, yet be sure to chew on the opposite side for the first 24 hours in order to keep food away from the extraction site.
- 6. Activity.** For the first 24 hours, your activity should be limited because increased activity can lead to increased bleeding. No bending over or heavy lifting for two to three days. Do not play any wind instruments or blow up balloons for a period of 10-14 days.