

# Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

## Fracture of the lower jaw

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of your forthcoming treatment and contains answers to many of the common questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation please ask a member of the medical or nursing staff.

### The problem

Your lower jaw has been broken. The number of fractures, where they have occurred and whether they need treatment to help them heal has already been established by the doctor who examined you.

### What does the operation involve?

- The treatment involves a general anaesthetic, which means you are going to be put to sleep completely.
- Once you are asleep, we will make a cut on the inside of your mouth through the gum.
- The broken bones are then put back together and held in place with small metal plates and screws.
- The gum is stitched back into place with dissolvable stitches, which can take a fortnight or even longer to fall out.
- Sometimes it is necessary to place wires or metal braces around your teeth so that elastic bands can be attached to them. Screws inserted into the jawbone above the teeth are occasionally used instead of these wires or metal braces.
- Any elastic bands are not usually attached until the day after your operation, which means that your jaws will be able to move freely when you wake up from surgery. The bands will guide your bite into the correct position after surgery.

### Will anything else be done while I am asleep?

Occasionally it is necessary to remove damaged or decayed teeth at the site of the fracture. In very difficult fractures, it is sometimes necessary to make a cut on the outside of the mouth through the skin. If this is going to take place, the site and size of the cut will be discussed with you before you sign any consent form for your operation.

### What can I expect after the operation?

- It is likely to be sore and regular painkillers will be given to you by the hospital doctor. The discomfort is usually worse for the first few days although it may take a couple of weeks to completely disappear.

- You will also be given antibiotics through a vein in your arm whilst you are in hospital to fight infection.
- You will be sent home with painkillers.
- You usually stay in hospital for one night following the surgery. The following day, the position of your fractures will be checked and X-rays may be taken before you are allowed home.
- Although the plates and screws hold the fractures in place it still takes around six weeks for your lower jaw to heal completely. During this time you need to eat a relatively **soft diet**. This will be discussed with you by the doctors, nurses and dietitians.
- It is also important that you keep your mouth as clean as possible for the first few weeks after surgery to prevent infection. It may be difficult to clean your teeth around stitches because it is sore. It is best to keep the area free from food debris by gently rinsing your mouth with a mouthwash or warm salt water (dissolve a flat teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water) starting on the day **after** surgery.
- If any wires, metal braces or screws are used to help guide your bite into the correct position they will be removed in the outpatient department when your doctors are happy that your fracture has healed.
- Contact sports or activities should be avoided for six weeks.

## Do I need to take any time off work?

Depending on the nature of your work you may need to take a fortnight or so off work. Avoid strenuous exercise for this time. It is important to remember that you should not drive or operate machinery for 48 hours after your general anaesthetic.

## What are the possible problems?

- Infection is uncommon because of the antibiotics that are used.
- Bleeding from the cuts inside your mouth is unlikely to be a problem. However, should the area bleed when you get home apply pressure over the site for at least 10 minutes with a rolled up handkerchief or swab.
- There is a nerve that runs through the centre of the lower jaw that supplies feeling to your lower lip, chin and bottom teeth. This nerve may have been bruised at the time of the fracture and as a result you might already feel some tingling or numbness in your lip and/or chin. This tingling may also be caused or made worse by surgery. In the majority of people the numbness gets better on its own although it can take several months to do so.
- Occasionally teeth next to the fracture site may be damaged by screws that are used.
- If it has been necessary to put any plates or screws in your jaw to hold it in position these are not normally removed unless they get infected because they tend not to cause problems. The metal that is used is titanium which does not set off metal detectors in airports etc.

## Will I need further appointments?

A review appointment will be arranged before you leave hospital. We will keep a close eye on you for several months following treatment to make sure that your jaw heals uneventfully.



We are currently working towards a smoke free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

## Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

[patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)



## Document history

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