

Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

Removal of submandibular salivary gland

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 staff.

What is the submandibular gland?

The submandibular gland is a salivary gland about the size of a plum that lies immediately below the lower jaw. Saliva drains from it through a tube (duct) that opens on the inside of the mouth under the tongue immediately behind the lower front teeth. The most common reason for removing a submandibular gland is as a result of infection that occurs if the tubes that drain saliva become blocked. Blockages usually arise as a result of stones.

What does the operation involve?

- The submandibular gland is removed under a general anaesthetic, which means that you are put to sleep completely.
- The operation involves a cut around two inches long (5cm) in the upper part of the neck just below the jaw line.
- Once the gland has been removed the incision is held together again with stitches. These usually need to be removed around a week after surgery.
- At the end of the operation a small tube is also placed through the skin into the underlying wound to drain any blood which may collect. This is usually removed on the morning following surgery.

Will anything else be done while I am asleep?

If your gland is being removed because of infection that is caused by a stone, it may also be necessary to make a cut inside the mouth to remove that stone.

How long will the operation take?

The length of time partly depends upon the degree of difficulty. In an uncomplicated procedure it will take approximately one hour to remove the submandibular gland.

What can I expect after the operation?

- You usually require a night in hospital following surgery.
- It is unlikely to be very sore but regular painkillers will be arranged for you.
- There is relatively little swelling following submandibular gland removal.

Do I need any time off work?

It is usually advisable to take a week off work to recover from the surgery. During this time you should avoid strenuous activity. It is important to remember that you will not be able to drive or operate machinery for 24 hours after your general anaesthetic.

Is there anything that I need to do when I get home?

It is important to keep the wound dry for the first week following surgery. This obviously means you need to take care when washing or shaving.

Will I have a scar?

All cuts made through the skin leave a scar but the majority of these fade with time and are difficult to see when they are fully healed. It may take several months for your scar to fade but eventually it should blend into the natural folds and contours of your face.

What are the possible problems?

- Bleeding from the wound is unlikely to be a problem. If it occurs it usually does so within the first 12 hours of surgery which is why you need to stay in hospital overnight.
- Infection is uncommon but if your surgeon thinks it may happen to you a short course of antibiotics will be prescribed.

The surgeon tells me that damage to nerves is possible. What does this mean?

There are three nerves that lie close to the submandibular gland that can be damaged during its removal. Most damage occurs as a result of bruising of the nerves since they are held out of the way and protected during surgery. If nerve damage occurs it is usually temporary. There are three nerves that can be damaged all with varying results:

- **Weakness of the lower lip** - a lower branch of the facial nerve is the nerve most likely to be bruised in the removal of a submandibular gland. If bruising occurs it affects the movement of your lower lip, leading to a slightly crooked smile.
- **Numbness of the tongue** - the lingual nerve is rarely bruised. Since it is the nerve that supplies feeling to the side of the tongue, bruising results in a tingly or numb feeling in the tongue, similar to the sensation after having an injection at the dentist.
- **Restricted tongue movement** - the hypoglossal nerve is only very rarely bruised. It is a nerve that makes the tongue move and damage can therefore result in decrease of tongue movement.

Is permanent nerve damage possible?

The majority of damage to nerves is temporary although it can take several months for them to recover. Permanent damage is possible and usually occurs in only the most difficult cases.

If a salivary gland is removed will I be left with a dry mouth?

The removal of one submandibular gland will not have an impact on the amount of saliva that you produce. There are many other salivary glands left in and around the mouth that will still keep it moist.

Adapted from:

British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons.

<http://www.baoms.org.uk/>



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Document history

Authors	Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery
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