Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Apicectomy

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Apicectomy

Patient Information

Maxillo Facial – Head and Neck Services

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The problem

An infection has occurred at the tip of the root or roots of a tooth, spreading into the surrounding bone that supports the tooth. Occasionally people may be unaware of the problem but usually there is discomfort, episodes of swelling, gumboils or bad taste.

Why do I need treatment?

If left untreated the infection will spread possibly developing into an abscess or cyst, or damaging bone around adjacent teeth. The tooth may become loose. The infection cannot be cured with antibiotics, but they are often used to give temporary relief of symptoms.

What is the treatment?

An apicectomy is a small surgical procedure designed to cure an infection at the tip of the root or roots of a tooth. Surgery is needed for a variety of reasons and it has proved impossible for your dentist to cure the infection by removing the dead nerve and placing a root filling.

It is most frequently carried out under local anaesthetic (injection into the gum). A small cut is made in the gum, which is then lifted off the bone. Access through the bone to the root tip is made using a drill. The infection is cleaned out, part of the root tip removed and a small filling placed in the end of the root. The gum is replaced with dissolvable stitches.

Benefits of the procedure

An apicectomy can help in preventing pain, discomfort, swelling and re-occurring infection to save the tooth.

Alternatives

An apicectomy is the final alternative to having the tooth extracted. The tooth can be left alone but infections will re-occur.

Risks

- Prolonged bleeding is rare but if it occurs, pressure with a cotton handkerchief or swab for at least 10 minutes usually stops it.
- Some tooth roots lie very close to important nerves which if damaged may cause numbness of the lower lip and chin on one side. If this risk is present your surgeon will discuss it with you.
- Occasionally the gum will shrink back slightly following surgery, which may expose the margin of a crown if one is present.
- The operation is occasionally unsuccessful due to a recurrence of infection. If it is unsuccessful, in some cases a re-apicectomy may be considered.

What can I expect after the operation?

As the local anaesthetic wears off a few hours after surgery there may be some discomfort, but this is quite variable. This is usually managed with a single dose of painkillers such as Ibuprofen. Antibiotics may also be prescribed. Painkillers are seldom required after the first day. Some swelling at the operation site and sometimes overlying skin is normal. This is worse 24 to 48 hours after the operation and resolves over the next few days.

It is important to keep the site of surgery as clean as possible. The area can be brushed gently with a toothbrush softened in hot water, together with hot salty mouthwash (teaspoon of salt in a beaker of warm water), two to three times a day, beginning the day after surgery

and continuing for one week.

Contact information

If you are experiencing any problems, you can contact the Maxillo-Facial Unit telephone 01942 822487. The Department is open Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm.



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