

Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

Lower Jaw (Mandible) Fractures: Patient Information

This leaflet aims to improve your understanding of your upcoming treatment and contains answers to frequently asked questions. If you have other questions that the leaflet does not answer or if you would like further explanation, please ask a member of staff.

The problem

Your lower jaw (mandible) has been broken. The doctor who examined you has already established the number of fractures, where they have occurred and whether they need treatment to help them heal. The treatment that is about to take place involves a general anaesthetic and you will be unconscious for the procedure.

What does the operation involve?

Once you are asleep the fracture sites are opened up. This involves making a cut on the inside of your mouth through the gum. The broken bones are then put back together and are held in place with small metal plates and screws. The gum is stitched back into place with dissolvable stitches that can take a fortnight or even longer to dissolve.

During the same operation it may also be necessary to place wires or metal braces around your teeth so that elastic bands can be attached to them and guide your bite into the correct position after surgery. 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. So your jaws will be able to move freely when you wake up from surgery.



Will anything else be done while I am asleep?

Occasionally it is necessary to remove damaged or decayed teeth in and around the site of the fracture. It maybe necessary to make a cut on the outside of the mouth through the skin. If this is going to take place, the site and the 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?

Your jaw is likely to be sore and regular painkillers will be arranged for you. The discomfort is usually worse for the first few days although it may take a couple of weeks to completely disappear. It is necessary to make sure that the fractures heal without any infection, so you will also be given antibiotics through a vein in your arm whilst in hospital. You will also be sent home with painkillers and a course of antibiotics.

- You usually stay in hospital one night following the surgery. The following day the position of the fractures will be checked with X-rays before you are allowed home. Although the screws and plates hold the fractures in place it still takes about six weeks for your jaw to heal completely. During this time you need to eat a relatively soft diet. The details of this will be discussed with you by the doctors, nurses and dieticians.
- 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 the stitches because it is sore. It is best to keep the area free from food debris by gently rinsing your mouth with a mouth wash of salt water (dissolve a flat teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water) starting on the day of surgery.
- You will also be given an antibacterial mouthwash called chlorhexidine (Corsodyl). This has the added benefit of reducing the plaque bacteria in your mouth.
- A small, soft infant tooth brush will also be of use to maintain your oral care to an adequate level. If you have problems with expelling the toothpaste then a moistened toothbrush will remove the plaque bacteria just as well, as it is not recommended to swallow toothpaste.

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- It is recommended that you do not brush with toothpaste and use chlorhexidine mouthwash at the same time as they do not work well together. It is advisable to either brush with toothpaste and rinse with water before using the mouthwash or rinse at different times.
- 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.

Do I need to take time off work?

Depending on the nature of your work it may be necessary to take about a fortnight off work and avoid strenuous exercise during this time. It is important to remember that you should not drive, operate machinery or sign any legally binding documents, for 48 hours after your general anaesthetic.

What are the possible problems?

- Infection is uncommon because of the antibiotics used.
- Bleeding from the cuts inside your mouth is unlikely to be a problem but if the area does bleed when you get home this can be usually stopped by applying pressure over the site for at least 10 minutes with a rolled up, clean, 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. For the majority of people the numbness gets better on its own although it can take several months to do so.
- Occasionally screws that are used may damage teeth next to the fracture site.
- 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 are infected, as they tend not to cause problems. The metal that is used is called titanium, which does not set off metal detectors in the airports etc.

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Will I need further appointments?

A review appointment will be arranged before you leave the hospital. You will be closely monitored for several months following treatment to make sure that your jaw heals completely.

Further information

Once you are discharged if further advice is required or information regarding your outpatient appointments, then please contact the Maxillofacial Unit (clinic 11) during office hours on: 024 7696 6500.

If you experience any problems out of these hours please contact: the Hospital switch board on: 024 7696 4000, asking for the Maxillofacial Senior.House.Officer on call.

Adapted from; British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons.
Available from, <http://www.baoms.org.uk/>

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact us on 024 7696 6500 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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