Jaw Surgery for an Overbite: What to Expect | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/jaw-surgery-correct-overbite/

Details:

Corrective jaw surgery, also called orthognathic surgery, changes the position or size of the upper jaw (maxilla), the lower jaw (mandible), or both. The surgeon cuts and realigns the jaw bone or bones, which are then held in their new position with small plates or screws. It is usually considered only for a moderate to severe overbite that braces or Invisalign cannot correct on their own. At Core Dental we can talk through whether it may apply to you and help coordinate a referral to a suitable surgeon.

What is corrective jaw surgery?

Corrective jaw surgery is also known as orthognathic surgery. It involves correcting the position or size of the upper jaw bone, the lower jaw bone, or both. During the operation the surgeon cuts and realigns the bone or bones, and then holds them in their new position using plates or screws.

It is a specialist procedure carried out in hospital by an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon. It is not a routine dental treatment, and it is planned carefully over a number of months in most cases.

Why might someone need jaw surgery for an overbite?

An overbite is a type of malocclusion, which means the teeth do not fit together as they should. With an overbite the upper front teeth overlap the lower front teeth by more than is typical.

When an overbite is severe and cannot be corrected with braces or Invisalign alone, jaw surgery may be recommended. Correcting a significant bite problem can help reduce the risk of complications such as excessive tooth wear, jaw pain and headaches. Whether surgery is advisable for you depends on your examination, your imaging and your goals, and the decision is made with the surgeon and orthodontist, not by dental appearance alone.

What other options exist for an overbite besides jaw surgery?

Many overbites can be improved without surgery. Other approaches may include:

teeth straightening through orthodontic treatment, such as braces or Invisalign

removing extra teeth or replacing missing teeth, where this is clinically appropriate

muscle relaxation techniques, where jaw muscles are contributing to the problem

Jaw surgery is generally reserved for moderate to severe cases. Our dentists can assess your bite and explain which of these options may suit you, and when it makes sense to see a specialist.

Who is on the team that performs jaw surgery?

Jaw surgery needs a team of health professionals working together. This usually includes:

an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, who performs the procedure

an orthodontist, because braces are usually needed before and after surgery to position the teeth

an anaesthetist, because the operation is done under general anaesthetic

occasionally a speech and language therapist

Your general dentist helps coordinate this care. Core Dental offers orthodontic care and works with oral and maxillofacial surgery referrals, and your dentist can organise a consultation with a surgeon at your request.

What is a typical jaw surgery recovery time?

Recovery differs for every person and every procedure. In general:

During surgery the upper and lower jaw bones may be held together to prevent unwanted movement. Mostly this is removed when the operation is finished, but in some cases the wires need to stay in place for a short time afterwards.

An all-liquid diet is usually needed straight after the procedure. This generally progresses fairly quickly to soft food and eventually to harder food, as your surgeon advises.

Your surgeon will usually prescribe pain relief to keep you comfortable and, in some cases, antibiotics to help prevent infection.

Swelling and bruising are not unusual and generally settle over time.

Overall recovery time varies widely. It can range from a couple of weeks for a minor procedure, because jaw surgery is not always major, up to around 12 months for a very complex case. Your surgeon will give you personal guidance. You can also read our general guidance on oral surgery recovery .

How much does jaw surgery cost?

The total cost of jaw surgery generally has three parts: the hospital fee, the anaesthetist's fee and the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon's fee. The main factor is whether surgery is on the upper jaw, the lower jaw or both. In many cases both jaws are treated, but this is not always necessary. The length of the operation, which depends on the complexity of your case, and a number of smaller factors also affect the cost.

Medicare rebates may apply, as may private health insurance rebates, depending on your individual cover. The only reliable way to estimate your cost is a consultation with an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, and your dentist can arrange this at your request. Orthodontic treatment before and after surgery is a separate cost, and at Core Dental we quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans for the dental part of your care.

How should you plan care and make an informed decision?

A useful first step is to explain your concern, symptoms, timing and goals when you book. Bring relevant medical information and a list of your current medicines. Your dentist can assess your teeth, gums, bite and surrounding tissues, request imaging when it is clinically appropriate and explain which options may suit you.

You may like to ask:

What is the recommended approach intended to achieve?

Are there reasonable alternatives?

What do preparation and aftercare involve?

What risks or limitations apply?

A written treatment plan can help you compare stages, expected appointments and payment arrangements before you proceed. If you have uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, a serious facial injury or another life-threatening symptom, call 000 immediately. For severe tooth pain or swelling without those signs, contact your dental practice promptly.

What an overbite is, measured rather than described

Before weighing surgery against anything else, it helps to know what the published definition actually is — because "overbite" is used loosely, and the clinical reference point is specific.

The Victorian Department of Health: "Excessive overbite. Upper front teeth normally cover less than half of the lower front teeth when the teeth are biting. When the upper front teeth cover more than half of the lower teeth, this could be an excessive overbite."

Less than half is normal. More than half "could be" excessive — the Department's own hedge, because this is a sign to assess rather than a diagnosis to make in front of a mirror.

The related conditions it distinguishes. "Underbite. The lower jaw normally sits behind the upper jaw at rest. When the lower front teeth sit in front of the upper front teeth, this could be an underbite. It can look like a person is sticking their lower jaw (or chin) forward." And separately, "protruding front teeth. This is often seen in children or adults with a history of thumb- or dummy-sucking."

Protruding front teeth and an excessive overbite are not the same thing, and they have different causes and different treatments.

Why an excessive overbite is treated at all. The Department's list of problems caused by misalignment includes "injury to the gum. If a tooth bites onto the opposite gum instead of another tooth, it may dig into the gum and cause pain or damage"; "wear and tear", where "biting and chewing can wear crooked teeth down in uneven and unusual ways" and those areas "can be difficult to repair, as fillings are more likely to break or wear down as well"; difficulty eating and chewing, where "you may also need to move your jaw in difficult positions to get your upper and lower teeth to line up"; and injury risk, since "front teeth that stick out or are not in line with other teeth, are more likely to be injured during sports or in a fall".

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Orthodontic treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 15 December 2025). Accessed 6 November 2026.

Where surgery sits, and who is qualified to do it

Surgery is the last option on the published list of orthodontic treatments, and the people who perform it hold a specialty with an unusual requirement. Both facts are worth having before a consultation.

What the Department says surgery is for. "Surgery. In complex cases, surgery may be required to remove buried teeth or make it easier for them to erupt into the mouth. Surgery can also be used to correct some jaw problems."

Complex cases. Its gapped-teeth page says the same in slightly different words: "in severe cases, surgery may be required to remove buried teeth, or make it easier for them to come out. Surgery can also be useful when there is a problem with the jaws, or to improve the outcome of orthodontic treatment."

Note that last clause: surgery can be used "to improve the outcome of orthodontic treatment" — which is to say, alongside appliances rather than instead of them.

What comes before surgery for a growing child. "Palatal expanders and functional appliances. Palatal expanders can widen the upper jaw. Functional appliances are used to correct bite problems. These are used in children when their jaw bones are still growing." Orthodontics Australia adds the timing: "Early orthodontic treatment begins while your child's jawbones are still soft. They do not harden until

children reach their late teens."

So in a child, a bite problem may be addressed by changing how the jaw grows. In an adult, that option has closed — which is the honest reason surgery enters the conversation for some adults and not for children with the same bite.

Who performs jaw surgery, and the requirement that makes the specialty unusual. The Dental Board of Australia: "Oral and maxillo-facial surgery is a specialty recognised by both the Dental Board of Australia and the Medical Board of Australia. You must hold qualifications in both medicine and dentistry."

Both medicine and dentistry. That is the published requirement, and it is the reason this specialty sits differently from the others. It is one of the "13 dental specialties in Australia which are approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council".

And it is checkable. "Ahpra publishes an online register of all dental practitioners that provides the profession and the public with up-to-date information about a dental practitioner's registration status. This register also includes details of the specialty or specialties for dentists who hold specialist registration." For anyone whose qualifications were obtained overseas, the Board notes that an application for assessment goes to the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons — an assessment pathway, not a registration authority.

Who the referral usually comes through. The Department's gapped-teeth page describes the referral chain: "You may be referred to an orthodontist - a dentist who has done additional study to specialise in the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of problems in the alignment of teeth and jaws." For more complicated cases, "you may also be referred to a prosthodontist - a dentist with additional training in restoring teeth, or even an oral maxillofacial surgeon who is trained in surgery of the teeth, bone, jaw and face."

On cost, there is no published figure , and that is itself useful to know: "Costs vary depending on the type of problem and the amount of treatment needed. Ask your dental practitioner for advice."

And on what you are entitled to before agreeing. "After this, they will create a treatment care plan and explain everything to you. Once you are happy with the care plan, treatment can begin." And if it is not clear: "If you are not happy with the care plan or do not understand it, it is important to let your dental practitioner know." For a decision of this size, that sentence is the most useful one on the page.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Orthodontic treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 15 December 2025); Teeth - gapped teeth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 July 2025); Orthodontics Australia (Australian Society of Orthodontists), When to see an Orthodontist, orthodonticsaustralia.org.au ; Dental Board of Australia, Specialist Registration, dentalboard.gov.au (the page states it was reviewed 18/03/2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Is orthognathic surgery the same as jaw surgery?

Yes. Orthognathic surgery is the medical name for corrective jaw surgery. It repositions or reshapes the upper jaw, the lower jaw or both, so that the jaws and teeth fit together more as intended.

Will braces be needed with jaw surgery?

Usually, yes. An orthodontist generally positions the teeth with braces before surgery and refines the bite afterwards. The timing and length of orthodontic treatment depend on your case, so ask your orthodontist and surgeon what to expect.

Is jaw surgery done under general anaesthetic?

Corrective jaw surgery is generally done in hospital under general anaesthetic, with an anaesthetist as part of the team. Your surgeon and anaesthetist will explain how this applies to you.

Can an overbite be corrected without surgery?

Many can. Braces, Invisalign, extractions or replacing missing teeth may help in suitable cases. Surgery is usually reserved for moderate to severe overbites that these approaches cannot correct alone, and an assessment is needed to know which applies to you.

Does Medicare or private health cover jaw surgery?

Medicare or private health rebates may apply, depending on the procedure and your individual cover. Please check with your health fund and surgeon, who can give you item numbers and an estimate of out-of-pocket costs.

What counts as an excessive overbite?

The Victorian Department of Health gives a reference point: "Upper front teeth normally cover less than half of the lower front teeth when the teeth are biting. When the upper front teeth cover more than half of the lower teeth, this could be an excessive overbite." Its own wording is "could be" — a sign to have assessed, not a diagnosis.

Is an overbite the same as protruding front teeth?

No. The Department treats them as separate categories. Protruding front teeth are "often seen in children or adults with a history of thumb- or dummy-sucking", where the upper jaw and front teeth are pushed forward.

What is an underbite?

"The lower jaw normally sits behind the upper jaw at rest. When the lower front teeth sit in front of the upper front teeth, this could be an underbite. It can look like a person is sticking their lower jaw (or chin) forward."

When is surgery actually needed?

The Department places it in complex cases: "In complex cases, surgery may be required to remove buried teeth or make it easier for them to erupt into the mouth. Surgery can also be used to correct some jaw problems." Its gapped-teeth page adds that surgery "can also be useful when there is a problem with the jaws, or to improve the outcome of orthodontic treatment" — alongside appliances, not instead of them.

Can a bite problem be corrected without surgery?

In a growing child, often. "Palatal expanders can widen the upper jaw. Functional appliances are used to correct bite problems. These are used in children when their jaw bones are still growing." Orthodontics Australia notes that jawbones "do not harden until children reach their late teens" — which is why the options differ for an adult with the same bite.

Who is qualified to perform jaw surgery?

An oral and maxillofacial surgeon, and the Dental Board of Australia describes an unusual requirement: "Oral and maxillo-facial surgery is a specialty recognised by both the Dental Board of Australia and the Medical Board of Australia. You must hold qualifications in both medicine and dentistry."

How can I check someone holds that specialty?

On the public register. "Ahpra publishes an online register of all dental practitioners ... This register also includes details of the specialty or specialties for dentists who hold specialist registration."

Who would refer me?

The Department describes the chain: you may be referred to "an orthodontist - a dentist who has done additional study to specialise in the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of problems in the alignment of teeth and jaws", and for more complicated cases to "a prosthodontist - a dentist with additional training in restoring teeth, or even an oral maxillofacial surgeon who is trained in surgery of the teeth, bone, jaw and face".

How much does it cost?

There is no published figure, because it depends on the case: "Costs vary depending on the type of problem and the amount of treatment needed. Ask your dental practitioner for advice."

What should happen before I agree to anything?

A plan you understand. "After this, they will create a treatment care plan and explain everything to you. Once you are happy with the care plan, treatment can begin." And: "If you are not happy with the care plan or do not understand it, it is important to let your dental practitioner know."

Related services and further reading

Orthodontics

Orthodontic braces

Invisalign treatment

Orthodontist

Oral and maxillofacial surgery

Oral surgery recovery

Why seeing a registered specialist matters

What to expect at your first Core Dental appointment

How can we help?

If you are concerned about an overbite or your bite, our dentists can examine you, explain your options and refer you to a specialist where needed. You can also explore our orthodontic services and specialist care . Call 13 13 16 or book online at any of our nine Core Dental practices.

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online through coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside Saturday 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

What is orthognathic surgery?

Orthognathic surgery is another name for corrective jaw surgery. A surgeon cuts and realigns the upper jaw, lower jaw or both and secures them with plates or screws. Core Dental dentists can discuss whether it may be relevant to your bite.

When is jaw surgery considered for an overbite?

Jaw surgery is generally reserved for a moderate to severe overbite that cannot be corrected with braces or Invisalign alone. Our dentists at Core Dental examine your bite and teeth before explaining whether surgery or other options suit you.

Which professionals are part of a jaw surgery team?

A jaw surgery team usually includes an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, an orthodontist, an anaesthetist and sometimes a speech and language therapist. A Core Dental dentist can help coordinate a referral to start this process.

How long does recovery from jaw surgery take?

Recovery varies widely, from a couple of weeks for minor procedures to around 12 months for very complex cases. Swelling and bruising are common, and diet moves from liquids to soft and then hard foods. Your surgeon gives personal advice.

What makes up the cost of jaw surgery?

The cost generally combines the hospital fee, the anaesthetist's fee and the surgeon's fee, and depends mostly on whether one or both jaws are treated. Medicare and private health rebates may apply. Core Dental can arrange a surgeon consultation for an estimate.

Does Core Dental offer orthodontic treatment before jaw surgery?

Core Dental clinics offer orthodontic care including braces and Invisalign, and our dentists can discuss how orthodontics may fit with a surgical plan. Availability of specialist sessions varies by clinic, so please confirm with your preferred practice.

How do I book an overbite assessment at Core Dental?

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. We have nine clinics across Melbourne and are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, with Sunday closed.