Oral Surgery Recovery: What to Expect | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/oral-surgery-recovery/

Details:

Recovery from oral surgery usually involves some pain, swelling, minor bleeding and a softer diet for a few days. Pain relief is generally started as soon as possible after surgery, ideally before the local anaesthetic wears off, and taken regularly for the first one to two days. Swelling often builds over the first 24 to 72 hours before it settles. At Core Dental we give you instructions to follow after your procedure, and you should contact your surgeon if bleeding or pain is not settling. Recovery varies from person to person.

When should you start pain relief after oral surgery?

Pain relief should be started as soon as possible after surgery, ideally before the local anaesthetic wears off. Regular use is recommended for the first one to two days. Your surgeon will tell you which medicines suit you and how often to take them.

Which pain relief medicines are commonly used?

Common options include ibuprofen (such as Nurofen or Nurofen Plus), taken every four to six hours, and paracetamol (such as Panadol, Panadeine or Panadeine Forte), also taken every four to six hours. Sometimes a stronger painkiller such as Endone is prescribed for more intense discomfort. Always follow the directions on the packaging or from your surgeon, and tell us about any allergies and other medicines you take.

How is bleeding managed after oral surgery?

Control bleeding by biting firmly on a gauze pack for 30 minutes. You may need to repeat this several times. Blood-stained saliva is common in the first day or so and is not usually a cause for concern. If bleeding persists despite these measures, contact your surgeon for further instructions.

Is swelling normal after oral surgery?

Yes. Swelling is unpredictable and is a very common side effect of oral surgery. It is more likely after longer procedures and tends to increase over the first 24 to 72 hours before it subsides. Bruising can appear as the swelling settles, and the skin and sometimes the neck may become discoloured. Applying ice packs as early as possible may slightly reduce swelling.

What is dry socket?

Dry socket happens when the blood clot in an extraction socket is lost. It usually appears within the first three to five days. The signs are increasing pain, with a bad taste and smell, without the other signs of infection. If you notice these signs, contact your surgeon.

What should you know about stitches?

Stitches are used to reposition the gum at the front of the mouth and to help control troublesome bleeding. They are not always needed at the back of the mouth, for example for wisdom teeth. If stitches are used, they are usually dissolvable and disappear in one to two weeks.

How should you look after your mouth and diet?

Resume normal tooth brushing as soon as possible, because it will not damage the healing sockets. Start mouth rinsing three to four times per day from the day after surgery. A teaspoon of salt in a glass of warm water is adequate for most people. A relatively soft diet is more comfortable straight after surgery, hot and spicy foods should be avoided, and it is important to keep up your fluid intake.

What follow-up should you expect?

A follow-up phone call is routinely made in the days after surgery to check that your progress is satisfactory. A routine review appointment is usually arranged for around two to three weeks after surgery, unless your surgeon advises otherwise. Your clinic will confirm the arrangements for your procedure.

How can you plan your care with our team?

A useful first step is to tell us about your concern, any symptoms and your goals when you book. Bring relevant medical information and a current list of medicines. Our team can then check your teeth, gums, bite and surrounding tissues, take imaging when it is clinically appropriate and explain which options suit you.

It is reasonable to ask what the recommended approach is meant to achieve, whether there are alternatives, and what preparation, aftercare and risks are involved. Time, fees and maintenance vary with each person's diagnosis, and a written treatment plan helps you compare stages and payment arrangements before you go ahead.

Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, a serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms. For severe tooth pain or swelling without these emergency signs, contact your dental practice promptly.

Who is qualified to carry out oral surgery in Australia?

Recovery advice makes more sense once you know who performed the surgery and what their training covers, because the answer is not one category but two.

The Dental Board of Australia recognises thirteen dental specialties, approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council. Two of them concern surgery, and they are separate entries on that list:

oral surgery

oral and maxillofacial surgery

The second carries a requirement unique among all thirteen. The Board states that oral and maxillofacial surgery "is a specialty recognised by both the Dental Board of Australia and the Medical Board of Australia", and that "you must hold qualifications in both medicine and dentistry." A practitioner holding that specialist registration has completed a medical degree as well as a dental one. Where such a qualification was obtained overseas, it must first be assessed by the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons before an application to Ahpra can proceed.

As with every specialty, there is a general-practice prerequisite: the Board's requirements include "a minimum of two years general dental practice" and meeting all the requirements for general registration as a dentist.

It is also worth saying that a great deal of oral surgery is performed by general dentists, competently and routinely — a straightforward extraction is ordinary general practice. Specialist referral is about complexity rather than about a procedure being off-limits.

Because the dual-degree requirement makes the oral and maxillofacial pathway substantially longer than any other, the total number of years involved depends on the route a particular surgeon took and where each qualification was completed. The Dental Board sets out the requirements rather than a duration, so no single total applies to everyone holding the registration. If the length of your surgeon's training matters to you, their record on the Ahpra register at ahpra.gov.au shows their registration and specialty, and they can describe their own pathway.

Source: Dental Board of Australia, Specialist Registration, dentalboard.gov.au (page reviewed 18 March 2025; accessed 3 November 2026).

What if your recovery involves an injury rather than planned surgery?

Some people reach this page after a knock rather than after a scheduled procedure, and the advice for that situation is different in one important respect: timing.

The Australian Dental Association's position on managing oral injury is that "persons who have suffered oral injury should be promptly assessed by a dentist and be treated and reviewed as recommended by the dentist." Prompt assessment is the instruction, and it applies whether or not the injury looks serious — damage to a tooth's nerve or its supporting structures is not always visible or painful at first.

The Australian Dental Association also explains why delay is costly: "oral damage is often irreversible, frequently complex, difficult, and costly to repair." For clinicians, it directs attention to the International Association of Dental Traumatology guidelines for the management of traumatic dental injuries, adding that treatment should comply with local regulation.

If an injury has already been treated, the recovery guidance on this page applies in the ordinary way, and the follow-up your clinician has arranged matters more than any general advice — reviewing an injured tooth over time is how a late complication gets caught.

Source: Australian Dental Association, Policy Statement 2.2.5, ada.org.au (reviewed 19 April 2024; accessed 3 November 2026).

Frequently asked questions

How long does oral surgery recovery take?

Recovery depends on the procedure, your health and how closely you follow your aftercare instructions. Swelling often peaks within the first 24 to 72 hours, and many people feel more comfortable after the first few days. Your surgeon will give you an estimate for your own procedure.

Can I brush my teeth after oral surgery?

Yes. Normal brushing can resume as soon as possible and will not damage the healing sockets. Take care around the surgical area, and begin gentle salt-water rinses the day after surgery.

What should I eat after oral surgery?

A relatively soft diet is usually more comfortable straight after surgery. Avoid hot and spicy foods and keep your fluids up. Your surgeon can advise on when to return to your usual foods.

When should I contact my surgeon after surgery?

Contact your surgeon if bleeding continues after firm pressure on a gauze pack, if pain increases several days after the procedure with a bad taste or smell, or if you are worried about your recovery. Call 000 for uncontrollable bleeding or difficulty breathing or swallowing.

Will I need stitches?

Not always. Stitches help reposition the gum at the front of the mouth and control bleeding, and they are often not needed at the back of the mouth. If they are used, they usually dissolve in one to two weeks.

What is the difference between an oral surgeon and an oral and maxillofacial surgeon?

Oral surgery and oral and maxillofacial surgery are separate entries on the Dental Board of Australia's list of 13 dental specialties. Oral and maxillofacial surgery is recognised by both the Dental Board of Australia and the Medical Board of Australia, and the Board states that a practitioner must hold qualifications in both medicine and dentistry. Oral surgery is recognised as a dental specialty without that dual-degree requirement.

Does a general dentist perform oral surgery?

Often, yes. A straightforward extraction is ordinary general dental practice. Referral to a specialist is a question of the complexity of the case rather than of a procedure being unavailable to general dentists.

How long is an oral and maxillofacial surgeon's training?

There is no single total that applies to everyone, because the number of years depends on the route taken and where each qualification was completed, and the Dental Board sets out the requirements rather than a duration. What is established is the structure: qualifications in both dentistry and medicine, a minimum of two years general dental practice, and specialist training in the field. Your surgeon can describe their own pathway, and their registration and specialty are recorded on the Ahpra register at ahpra.gov.au.

I was injured rather than operated on. How soon should I be seen?

Promptly. The Australian Dental Association's position is that a person who has suffered an oral injury should be promptly assessed by a dentist, then treated and reviewed as the dentist recommends. Damage to a tooth's nerve or supporting structures is not always visible or painful at first, so a tooth that seems fine can still need assessment.

Where did my surgeon's overseas qualification get assessed?

If the qualification is in oral and maxillofacial surgery and was obtained overseas, the Dental Board of Australia requires it to be assessed first by the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons before an application for specialist registration proceeds.

Related services and further reading

Oral and maxillofacial surgery

Wisdom tooth extraction

General tooth extraction

Recovery following an extraction

How long to recover from wisdom tooth extraction?

What can I expect from jaw surgery?

What is a dental emergency and what should I do?

Why is dental health important during pregnancy?

Specialist care

How can we help?

If you are preparing for oral surgery or have questions about recovery, our team can help at any of our nine Core Dental clinics. Call 13 13 16 or book online, and we will arrange a consultation. You can also read about what to expect at your first Core Dental appointment .

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 mornings, Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

This article is general in nature and does not replace advice from a registered dental practitioner who has examined you. Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

When should pain relief be started after oral surgery?

Pain relief should be started as soon as possible after surgery, ideally before the local anaesthetic wears off, and taken regularly for the first one to two days. Core Dental surgeons will advise which medicines suit you.

How do you stop bleeding after oral surgery?

Bite firmly on a gauze pack for 30 minutes, repeating if needed. Blood-stained saliva is common early on. If bleeding persists, contact your surgeon for instructions, and call 000 for uncontrollable bleeding. Core Dental can advise on aftercare.

How long does swelling last after oral surgery?

Swelling tends to increase over the first 24 to 72 hours before it subsides, and bruising may appear as it settles. Ice packs applied early may slightly reduce swelling. Contact the Core Dental team if you are concerned.

What are the signs of dry socket?

Dry socket usually presents within three to five days of an extraction, with increasing pain and a bad taste and smell, without other signs of infection. Contact your surgeon at Core Dental if you notice these signs.

Are stitches after oral surgery dissolvable?

If stitches are used, they are usually dissolvable and disappear within one to two weeks. They are used to reposition the gum at the front of the mouth and help control bleeding, and are not always needed at the back.

How should I clean my mouth after oral surgery?

Resume normal tooth brushing as soon as possible. From the day after surgery, rinse three to four times a day with a teaspoon of salt in a glass of warm water. Our Core Dental team will give you instructions for your own procedure.

How many Core Dental clinics are there?

Core Dental has nine clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie. Call 13 13 16 or book online to find the clinic nearest you.

When are Core Dental clinics open?

Our clinics are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, and closed on Sunday. Saturday hours finish at 1.30pm, and Bayside opens at 8.30am on Saturdays. Call 13 13 16 to confirm your clinic.