Fracture of Lower Jaw

Introduction

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of your forthcoming treatment. If you have any further questions, please ask a member of the medical or nursing staff or contact us on the phone number at the end of this leaflet.

The problem

Your lower jaw has been broken. The number of fractures, where they have occurred and whether they need surgery (an operation) to help them heal has already been established by the doctor who examined you. If surgery is necessary, the fractured bones will be held in the correct place whilst healing occurs. This ensures that your teeth meet together correctly and pain is minimised. If surgery is not carried out when recommended it is likely you will suffer significant pain and infection and the bones may not heal in the correct position. Your teeth may not meet together correctly as a result causing pain, infection and problems when eating.

What does the operation involve?

The operation that is about to take place involves a general anaesthetic which means you will be asleep during the procedure.

Once you are asleep the fracture sites will be 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 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 after the operation.

During the same operation, it is often necessary to place wires or metal braces around your teeth so that elastic bands can be attached to them to 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 at the site of the fracture. In very difficult fractures it is sometimes necessary to make a cut on the outside of the mouth through the skin. If this is going to take place, the site and 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?

You are likely to feel sore and regular pain relief 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 also necessary to make sure that the fractures heal without any infection and so you will also be given antibiotics through a vein in your arm whilst you are in hospital. You will be sent home with painkillers and a course of antibiotics which you must complete.

You are likely to need to stay in hospital for one night following the surgery. The following day the position of your fractures will be checked with X-rays before you are allowed home.

Although the plates and screws hold the fractures in place, it still takes around six weeks for your lower jaw to heal completely. During this time, you need to eat a relatively soft diet, the nature of which will be discussed with you by the doctors, nurses and dieticians. It is also important to keep your mouth clean and that you brush your teeth carefully and thoroughly for the first few weeks after surgery to prevent infection. It may be difficult to clean your teeth around stitches because it will be sore.

It is best to keep the area free from food debris by gently rinsing your mouth with the mouthwash you will be prescribed or warm salt water (dissolve a flat teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water) commencing on the day after surgery.

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 any time off work?

Your doctor will discuss the specifics of this with you before discharge. Depending on the nature of your work, it may be necessary to take a fortnight or so off work and to avoid strenuous exercise during this time. It is important to remember that you should not drive or operate machinery for 48 hours after your general anaesthetic.

What are the possible problems?

- Infection is uncommon because antibiotics are used to reduce the chances of infection
- Bleeding from the cuts inside your mouth is unlikely to be a problem but should the area bleed when you get home this can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the site for at least ten minutes with a rolled up handkerchief, clean tea towel or gauze 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. In the majority of people the numbness gets better on its own although it can take several months to do so. In some circumstances, it can be permanent
- Occasionally teeth adjacent to the fracture site may be damaged by screws that are used
- 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 get infected because they tend not to cause problems. The metal that is used is titanium which does not set off metal detectors in airports etc.

Will I need further appointments?

A review appointment will be arranged before you leave hospital. It is usual to keep a close eye on you for several weeks following treatment to make sure that your jaw heals correctly. Further follow-up appointments may be to review your progress.
Contact information
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the oral and maxillofacial surgery department.

Outpatient department
New and follow-up clinic booking enquiries
Tel: 0300 422 6940
Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 4:30pm
Minor surgery (local anaesthetic with/without sedation) booking enquiries
Tel: 0300 422 8191
Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 4:30pm

Inpatient and Day Surgery Unit booking enquiries
Tel: 0300 422 8192
Tel: 0300 422 3197
Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 4:30pm

Post-operative concerns
Please contact the Hospital switchboard on Tel: 0300 422 2222 and ask for the ‘operator’ when prompted. When the operator responds, please ask to be put through to the ‘on-call senior house officer for Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery’.

Website
For further information, please visit the Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery webpage: www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk/glosmaxfax

Feedback
We would welcome your feedback regarding your treatment.
Please visit the comments section on NHS choices (www.nhs.uk).
Feedback can also be left on the Gloucestershire Hospitals twitter account: @gloshospitals

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