

**Patient
Information**

Dental Assessment Clinic

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about what to expect in the Dental Assessment Clinic before and after having your radiotherapy treatment to the head and neck area. It also explains why it is important to have a dental assessment and why you may have to have some treatment in your mouth in the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Department.

Why do I need to see a dentist?

All patients who receive radiotherapy as part of their cancer treatment have a pre-treatment dental assessment. You will also have an X-ray of your mouth. We will assess your mouth and teeth to identify and remove any dental decay or infection. This will help to reduce any problems you may have in your mouth during or after your cancer treatment.

What will happen if my teeth and gums are not healthy when radiotherapy begins?

Radiotherapy causes the risk of a condition called osteoradionecrosis which is a condition where the jawbone dies in places. This condition is painful and hard to treat. It is because radiotherapy causes changes to the bone making it less able to heal itself. This means that patients are at a higher risk of osteoradionecrosis if a dental extraction is need after the radiotherapy treatment.

There is also a higher risk this will happen if your mouth and teeth are not as healthy as they could be.

To reduce the chance of developing this condition it is important not to have any teeth taken out while having radiotherapy. Tooth sockets will not heal well and osteoradionecrosis could happen. Any poor quality teeth should be taken out before the radiotherapy treatment starts.

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Department

**Oral &
Maxillofacial
Surgery**

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The dental team will assess your mouth and may recommend simple fillings or the smoothing of any sharp teeth or dentures by your own dentist. You will also be referred to a dental hygienist to make sure your gums are as healthy as possible.

How is it decided which teeth are to be taken out?

The consultant dentist you see will decide which teeth will need to be taken out. Their decision will be based on which area of your mouth or throat will receive radiotherapy. Sometimes only one side of your face and neck will receive radiotherapy; sometimes it can be to both sides.

If your teeth are very decayed, deeply filled or loose then these teeth are most likely to be recommended for removal.

The consultant assessing your teeth will explain which teeth are recommended to be removed and involve you in any decision about your care and treatment.

Consent for treatment

If you decide to go ahead with treatment you will be asked to sign a consent form. By signing this form you are agreeing to have the treatment and you understand what it involves.

What happens during my dental extractions?

Most teeth are taken out under local anaesthetic (while you are awake). The surgeon will inject some anaesthetic in to your gums to numb the teeth.

What if I am very anxious about dental treatment?

If you are worried that you may not be able to cope with having your teeth removed under local anaesthetic please tell us at your assessment appointment. We will be able to arrange treatment using sedation (medication to relax you) or a general anaesthetic (where you will be asleep for the procedure). However, because these treatments can be more difficult to arrange it could delay the start of your radiotherapy.

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After you have had your teeth taken out

You can usually go straight home. Your surgeon will give you some after care instructions.

Follow up appointment

We will see you between 4 and 6 months after you have completed your radiotherapy treatment. This will be for a dental and general oral check-up. An appointment will be sent to you in the post.

Your dental treatment plan

- Pre-treatment dental assessment.
- An appointment with a dental hygienist.
- Teeth removed as necessary.
- You will have any fillings or other treatment recommended for your own dentist to complete.

2 weeks approximately after your tooth extractions (if needed):

- Radiotherapy will begin.

6 months after completion of radiotherapy:

- Review by a dental consultant.
- New dentures can be made if needed by your own dentist.
- After the 6 month review you will be discharged to your previous dentist or you will need to find a dentist to keep your dental care under review.

When can I have dentures made if needed?

Dentures are not made before 6 months after you have completed your radiotherapy treatment. This is because it is really important that your gums have healed properly after your radiotherapy.

If dentures are made too early they can cause pain and damage to the gums and even osteoradionecrosis.

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What if I need to have teeth out in the future?

You must tell your normal dentist that you have had radiotherapy to your head and neck. If you change dentists you must tell them too. Normal dental treatment can be carried out but every attempt must be made to prevent more teeth being taken out in the future.

If you do need any dental extractions you must be referred to the Oral and Maxillofacial Department by your own dentist. This is because your dental extractions will need to be performed by a specialist.

Contact information

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

Tel: 0300 422 8175

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm

Head and Neck Macmillan Clinical Nurse Specialist

Tel: 0300 422 6785

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 4:00pm

Further information

Mouth Cancer Foundation

Website: www.mouthcancerfoundation.org

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