

For Patients

About Dental Emergencies



Most dental problems can be dealt with during regular dental office hours.

This pamphlet identifies symptoms that might indicate a dental emergency that needs more immediate treatment. It also outlines what you can expect from your dentist if you do have a dental emergency.

What is a dental emergency?

Dental emergencies can have many causes, including accidents, sports-related injuries, tooth decay and infection.

You may have a dental emergency if you have any of the following:

- a traumatic injury to your mouth, jaw or teeth
- severe pain that you cannot control with over-the-counter pain medication
- uncontrolled bleeding
- severe swelling in your mouth, face or neck

NOTE: If you have trouble breathing or your mouth continuously fills with blood, call 9-1-1 or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

Contacting a dentist

All dentists in B.C. are required to provide patients with emergency dental care when the need arises. If a dentist is unavailable, he or she is expected to make other arrangements so that a dentist on call or another service can help patients in need. It is important that you, or someone with you, provide the dentist with an accurate description of your problem, including whether you have had any recent dental work done.

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What to expect

Once the dentist reviews your situation over the phone, he or she may meet you right away or see you as soon as possible during regular office hours. He or she may also refer you to another dentist or to your local hospital if appropriate.

The dentist may tell you things you can do at home to help ease your symptoms and may also prescribe medication by phone. It is important to follow the instructions given to you.

Patients can also contact HealthLink BC by visiting www.HealthLinkBC.ca online or by phoning 8-1-1. This 24-hour-a-day service gives you easy access to non-emergency health and dental information and services. You will be able to speak to a registered nurse about your symptoms, get more details about your condition or speak to a pharmacist about your medication questions.

Preventing dental emergencies

Not all dental emergencies can be prevented but you can take steps to reduce problems that can lead to an emergency.

- Practice good oral hygiene and see a dentist regularly
- See a dentist as soon as pain or problems start — before they become severe
- Wear protective equipment like mouth guards and helmets when playing sports
- Wear seatbelts while riding in a car

More information about dental emergencies

B.C. Dental Association

www.bcdental.org

College of Dental Surgeons of BC

www.cdsbc.org/dental_emergencies

Canadian Dental Association

www.cda-adc.ca/en/oral_health/complications/emergencies/index.asp

American Dental Association

www.ada.org/public/manage/emergencies.asp

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For Patients

Patient Instructions for Care After Oral Surgery



What to expect

Bleeding

It is normal to have some bleeding for about 24 hours following surgery. If this occurs, use a fresh gauze pack or moist tea bag on the surgical site, elevate your head and bite firmly on the pack for 30 minutes. Typically two to three changes will be sufficient. Do not apply the pack if bleeding is only minimal. Phone 9-1-1 promptly if your mouth continuously fills with blood.

Pain

Some discomfort is normal following any surgical procedure (including dental extraction). This can be minimized by taking medication as prescribed or recommended by your dentist or oral and maxillofacial surgeon. Pain medication works better if started before the onset of pain and taken on a regular schedule. Call your dentist if pain develops three to four days after the surgery; a protective dressing may be required.

Swelling

Swelling and bruising often occur after surgery. Swelling typically increases for the first three or four days, then gradually subsides over the following three to seven days. If the swelling causes difficulty swallowing or breathing, contact your dentist immediately. If the swelling gets better over the first three days, then gets worse, call your dentist.

Numbness

Occasionally patients experience some numbness in their lip or tongue after lower jaw surgery – this generally resolves in time. Please let your dentist know if this occurs.

Nausea

Occasionally patients feel sick to their stomach (nauseated) for the first few days following surgery. Drinking carbonated water may be helpful. Call your dentist if this is a persistent problem.

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Patient Instructions for Care After Oral Surgery



Post-surgery instructions

- **Take all medications** as recommended.
- **Drink a lot of fluids** and eat soft, lukewarm food the first day.
- **Apply ice packs** to the face throughout the first day (20 minutes on, 20 minutes off and chilling the pack when not in use). This should be done whether or not you have swelling or bruising.
- **Avoid spitting or sucking** on a straw during your first day following surgery. It is important for smokers to refrain from smoking during the first 24 hours after surgery.
- **Do not rinse your mouth** on the day of surgery. On the second day, rinse every four to six hours with a cup of warm to hot water mixed with ½ teaspoon of salt. Continue this for approximately one week.
- **Avoid excessive physical activity and alcohol** for the rest of the day following surgery.
- **Start tooth brushing** carefully the day after surgery.
- If you are taking birth control medication and antibiotics are prescribed for your surgery, be sure to **use an additional means of contraception** for the duration of your cycle.

Call your dentist if you have any questions or concerns about your healing process.



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