

DENTAL EXTRACTIONS

Written by Dr Mark Daniel Atkinson

Removal of teeth is a common dental procedure that is done in every practice around the world every day.

There are two ways that a tooth can be removed. The first method is called a 'simple extraction.' This involves removing the tooth by first loosening it with an elevator and then delivering it with forceps.

Some teeth, however, are required to be removed 'surgically.' This will involve making a small incision in your gum to help visualise the tooth. It may involve removing a small portion of bone around the tooth or dividing the tooth into segments to lift them out. The gum will be closed back over with dissolvable stitches.

Whether you remove a tooth 'simply' or 'surgically' depends on many factors but 'surgically' does not necessarily mean that is a more complex or traumatic procedure. In fact, often time, removing a tooth surgically is the better and quicker option. This is an important step in treatment planning and your practitioner should have a surgical plan developed to carry the extraction out most predictably.

Teeth may be removed due to pulpal or periodontal infection, orthodontics, impaction, trauma, or other pathology. A tooth will not be removed without three key entities:

1. An appropriate radiograph of the tooth
2. A diagnosis of the tooth
3. Informed consent from yourself

The recovery after an extraction is varied but is usually no more than a couple of days of mild to moderate tenderness and swelling. You will be prescribed an appropriate analgesic (pain killer). Not all patients require antibiotics. Antibiotic prescription increases microbial resistance and there are potential side effects such as allergy or stomach upset.

There are risks with surgery but each case will be dependent on medical factors and the tooth to be removed. Discuss case specifics with your surgeon.

For most cases, the soft tissue of the area will heal over two weeks so it is imperative that you continue using a mouth rinse for two weeks after the extraction to keep all food out. The bone takes a few months to completely heal. More comprehensive post-operative instructions will be given to you after the procedure specific to your case.

In general, you are not to cease any medication (for example blood thinners) prior to extraction unless your health practitioner has instructed you. For treatment carried out under local anaesthetic, it is best if you eat before the procedure. Those undergoing treatment under general anaesthetic will have more detailed instructions given to them.

Not all teeth need to be replaced. No one ever died from missing a tooth. However, if there will be functional or aesthetic limitations after surgery, then replacing the tooth may be of benefit. There may be other steps taken to optimise the site for the prosthesis that will be used to replace the tooth (for example; dental implant, bridge, removable denture). A discussion about replacement options prior to extraction is critical.

Hopefully the information in this leaflet will answer most of your questions about dental extractions. If you have any further questions, discuss this with your dental practitioner or Oral Surgeon.