

## Patient information

### **Apicectomy**

#### Liverpool University Dental Hospital

Your dentist has advised you that you will need to have an apicectomy. This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of the treatment and contains answers to many of the commonly asked questions.

If you have any other questions, or would like further explanation please ask a member of the clinical staff.

#### **The problem**

An infection has occurred at the tip of the root of one of your teeth. Sometimes this does not cause any symptoms but usually people are aware of discomfort and occasional episodes of swelling, gumboils or bad taste. You may already have been given a course of antibiotics in an attempt to treat the infection.

#### **Why do I need treatment?**

If left untreated the infection is likely to develop into an abscess or cyst. As well as causing pain this can lead to the loss of bone surrounding the root. As a result, the tooth may become loose.

#### **What does treatment involve?**

Your dentist may have already tried to get rid of the infection by removing the nerve of the tooth and placing a root filling. There may also be a long-standing root filling in the tooth that has failed. The infection now needs to be removed surgically in a procedure called an "apicectomy". This involves cleaning out the infection from the bone, removing a small portion of the tip of the root of the tooth. The root may then be sealed with a small filling.

Access to the root is made by cutting and peeling back the gum and removing a small amount of bone. At the end of the operation the gum is stitched back into place with dissolvable stitches that take around two weeks to disappear.

#### **Are there any alternative treatments available?**

As the source of the infection is the root of the tooth the alternative way of treating this would be to extract (remove) the tooth itself. Under certain circumstances it may be possible to have the original root filling repeated. Your surgeon will advise you if this is the case.

## **What will happen if I don't have treatment?**

As stated above, the infection is likely to develop into an abscess or cyst, which is more likely to cause pain. This may destroy the bone surrounding the tooth, causing it to become loose and occasionally, adjacent teeth are affected.

## **What type of anaesthetic is used?**

A number of options are available; commonly a local anaesthetic is used.

### **Local anaesthetic**

This is an injection into the gum surrounding the tooth, rather similar to that you may have had at your dentist for a filling. The injection takes a couple of minutes to numb the area and means that you will feel no pain while the surgery is carried out.

Like all medicines, local anaesthetics may sometimes cause side effects, as well as the effects that are needed. You may experience dizziness, blurred vision, drowsiness and rarely loss of consciousness.

Serious side effects are very rare and include fits, low blood pressure, slowed breathing and changes in heartbeat, which may be life-threatening. If you have concerns about any of these effects you should discuss them with your dentist.

### **Local anaesthetic and intravenous sedation**

In addition to a local anaesthetic injection you can be given an injection into your arm. This makes you feel relaxed and less aware of the procedure. Further information is available in PIF number 641.

### **General anaesthetic**

Rarely it may be necessary to carry out an apicectomy under a "day case" general anaesthetic, i.e. although you are put to sleep completely you will be able to go home on the same day as surgery. **For more information, please ask for a copy of the Royal College of Anaesthetists Patient Information "You and Your Anaesthetic".**

## **What can I expect after the operation?**

When the local anaesthetic wears off a few hours after surgery you will have some discomfort. Your surgeon will give advice about painkillers. Occasionally, it is necessary to take a course of antibiotics.

The discomfort is usually worse for the first few days although it may take a couple of weeks to completely disappear. You may need a few days off work, during which time you should avoid strenuous exercise.

Some swelling can occur both inside and outside the mouth after surgery. This is usually most noticeable for about two days. There may also be bruising due to bruising under the skin in this area.

**It is important to keep the site of surgery as clean as possible for the first few weeks after surgery.**

You will be given full instructions about the care of your mouth after the surgery is completed.

### **What are the possible problems?**

It is unusual for the area to bleed excessively after surgery, but if this does happen, it can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the area for at least ten minutes with a rolled up handkerchief or swab. If the bleeding does not stop you will need to contact the department (or on-call dentist).

Lifting the gum to uncover the root of the tooth can sometimes lead to a numb feeling in the gum. This usually disappears after a few months. The gum occasionally shrinks back a few months after surgery as scar tissue forms. This is not normally a problem but if the tooth has been crowned, the edge of the crown may become exposed.

Even if all the infection is successfully removed it can sometimes return months or even years later. If this happens it might be necessary to have the operation repeated but sometimes the tooth is better removed.

### **Feedback**

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

### **Further information**

**If you experience any urgent postoperative difficulty on a Saturday, Sunday or after 5.00 pm on a week day, please contact the NHS helpline by telephoning 111.**

**Depending on your situation, the NHS 111 team can connect you to a nurse, emergency dentist or even a GP and can arrange face-to-face appointments if they think you need one.**

### **Contact Numbers**

**Local Anaesthesia Department**

**Tel: 0151 706 5253**

**Text phone Number: 18001 0151 706 5253**

**NHS 111**

**Tel: 111**

**Author: Liverpool University Dental Hospital**

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