

## Frequently Asked Questions

*When can I take the gauze out?*

The gauze sponge acts as a pressure dressing to help stop the bleeding. Therefore, the gauze can be removed once the bleeding has stopped completely or slowed to the point where you are comfortable. The gauze can be removed during meals and replaced if you wish. It sometimes takes many hours for the bleeding to totally stop, but in all cases it should be stopped by the morning following surgery.

*When will the bleeding stop?*

See Question 1.

*It has been 3 days since my procedure, and I am more uncomfortable and swollen today than I was the day after. Do I have an infection?*

After surgery, the inflammatory response takes about 72 hours to reach its peak. Therefore it is completely normal to be more swollen and therefore more uncomfortable 3 to 4 days after surgery. This is true of any type of surgery, particularly surgery that involves bone.

*The tissue near the surgical area is reddish and white. Do I have an infection?*

Healing tissue is often reddish or white. Think about a scab on your skin after you come out of the ocean or the bath. It is typically whitish red. Your mouth is wet, and there is healing tissue where the wounds are. Thus, the color you see is normal.

*I have a fever. Does that mean I have an infection?*

Fever is most often a response to a hyper-metabolic state, caused by your body's attempt at healing. Also, fever may occur because of dehydration so be sure to take in fluids often. If you have any concerns, however, or your oral temperature exceeds 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit, you should call the doctor.

*How do I know if I have an infection?*

Infections typically do not occur until 5 to 7 days after a surgical procedure, or longer. You will know there is an infection because there will be increased swelling, redness and fever, as well as discomfort. If you think you have an infection, call the doctor immediately.

*Do I need an antibiotic?*

If your procedure was done with intravenous sedation, antibiotics were given through the IV and this single dose is all that is needed. Antibiotics are very overused in general, and the vast majority of oral surgical procedures do not require antibiotic therapy.

*What can I eat?*

You can eat whatever you want, so long as it is comfortable to actually ingest it. It is best to eat foods that are bland in taste, cool in temperature, and soft in texture for the first several days. If you do not feel like eating because of anesthesia or any other reason, be sure to sip some Gatorade or apple juice to avoid dehydration and low blood sugar.

*When can I eat?*

You can sip liquids as soon as you are awake and alert enough to manage. Do not chew any foods until the effects of the local anesthetic have worn off. Otherwise, you may accidentally bite your lip or tongue.

*Why can't I use a straw?*

It's basically a myth. You can use a straw if it is to drink water or some other thin liquid. Do not use a straw for a milkshake or anything thick because the suction action may cause bleeding.

*There are big holes in my mouth where the tooth was. Will they close? When? Will food get stuck in them?*

Yes, the wounds will close slowly over time. The amount of time it takes will depend on how large the wound is to begin with. In general, there is no problem with things getting lodged in them, however, gentle rinsing, starting the day after the surgery, will help prevent this.

*Do I need to rinse my mouth out? When? What do I use?*

Gentle rinsing is best started the day after the procedure. Do this 1 to 2 times a day with either warm salt water or mouthwash mixed with water. Do not gargle or rinse vigorously, as this will interfere with healing, cause pain and promote bleeding.

*What is a dry socket?*

After a tooth extraction, a blood clot forms and acts as a protective coating, much as a scab does on the skin. In a small percentage of people, the clot is lost prematurely, resulting in exposed bone, which then results in a burning-type pain. The procedure is more common in smokers. The procedure can also occur if one rinses too vigorously. They typically occur after the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> day of surgery.

*When can I go back to work?*

This depends on the extent of the procedure you had, and the type of work you do. It is not advisable for an airline pilot or lifeguard to return to work while having a high narcotic requirement for pain management. A person who works at home from their own computer could probably go back to work the same day, provided they did not have IV anesthesia. If you have concerns, call the doctor.

*How do I take the pain medication? Do I have to take them?*

The medication is for your discomfort. If you prefer not to take them, you do not need to. If you are given a prescription for ibuprofen (Motrin) and a narcotic, I recommend taking the ibuprofen in the morning, afternoon, evening and bedtime, and supplementing with the narcotic doses in between the aforementioned doses.

*How long until I feel normal?*

How long your recovery takes depends on many factors including the extent of the procedure and your own capacity to heal, as well as your compliance with the post-operative instructions. In general, most people are about 80% back to normal after 10 to 14 days.

*When can I drive?*

If you have had intravenous anesthesia, you cannot operate a motor vehicle or machinery for 24 hours. It is best to avoid these activities while taking narcotics, as well.

*Do the sutures dissolve?*

Yes. Sometimes the sutures dissolve very quickly, after a day or so. Sometimes they take about a week. But ultimately they do dissolve. Sometimes, when the sutures dissolve, they pop a little bit. If this occurs, there may be a little bleeding. This is normal.

*How do I take care of the wound sites?*

Do as little as possible. Very gentle rinsing and brushing of the adjacent teeth is all that is required, again, be gentle.

*I feel like my cheek is stitched to the inside of my mouth. Is that what you did?*

Sometimes the scarring that occurs in the wisdom tooth area initially makes you feel like the inside of your cheek is stuck to the back corner of your mouth. This is not because of suturing; it is just a natural phenomenon. Rest assured, the scar tissue ultimately softens and you will go back to feeling normal with time.