



Patient Information Leaflet

Jaw Cysts

Cork University Dental
School & Hospital



This leaflet has been designed to explain jaw cysts and it contains answers to many frequently asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer, or if you would like further information, please ask us.

What is a jaw cyst?

A jaw cyst is a cavity full of fluid which forms inside your jaw bone. They can form around the roots of your teeth or around teeth that are buried. They are **not** cancerous.

Why do jaw cysts form?

Most jaw cysts form because of infection coming from a tooth which is broken or bad. Another type of cyst forms in the covering that is found around buried teeth. Some cysts are formed by the cells which originally formed your teeth.

What problems can jaw cysts cause?

Most jaw cysts grow very slowly and you may not know that you have one until your dentist takes an x-ray for some other reason. Because they are a cavity inside your jaw bone they can weaken your jaw and make it more likely to break. Cysts may get infected and when this happens they can be very painful. As the cyst grows, the teeth nearby may get damaged or loose. There are nerves in your jaw bone that may be damaged and this would cause numbness or tingling in your lips, gums or teeth. When the cyst is very big you will notice a swelling in your jaw.

What treatment will I need?

You will have x-rays and sometimes a scan to see how large the cyst is. The type of surgery will depend on the size of the cyst and what kind of cyst it is. Usually, a cut will be made in your gum over the cyst to uncover it. If the cyst is not very large then the whole lining of the cavity will be removed and sent to the laboratory to be examined. Your gum will then be stitched back in place with dissolvable stitches and the cavity in the bone will gradually heal during the weeks and months that follow. Teeth which are buried, broken or bad may need to be removed at the same time.

Sometimes the cyst is too large to remove all the lining at one time. In this case your surgeon will remove part of the lining and leave a small opening (hole) into the cavity. The cavity will be washed out and packed with an antiseptic gauze pack which helps prevent infection and keeps the hole open to your mouth. The cyst will slowly shrink over the following weeks and months until it is possible to remove the rest of the lining and close the hole. You will need to have the pack changed regularly during this time.

What sort of appointment will I need?

There are usually three options – depending on how difficult the surgery will be. These appointment options are:

- 1. Local Anaesthetic** – an injection into your gum to make the area completely numb - just as you would have for a filling with your own dentist. This is suitable for small cysts.
- 2. Local Anaesthetic with Sedation** – an injection into your arm or a gas to breathe to help you feel more relaxed during treatment.
- 3. General Anaesthetic** – you are put to sleep completely in a hospital theatre. This is used for larger cysts and cysts that are in awkward positions. The surgery is done as a day case - you come into hospital and go home on the same day.

What are the risks?

As with all surgery there is a risk of pain, swelling, bruising, bleeding and infection.

- Some slight bleeding from the cuts inside your mouth is common in the first day or so. It is unlikely to be a problem and it can usually be stopped by putting pressure on the area for at least 15 minutes with a rolled up damp handkerchief or gauze swab.
- The area can get infected – this can be treated with antibiotics.
- There is a nerve that runs through a tunnel in the centre of your lower jaw. This gives the feeling to your lower lip, chin and bottom teeth. This nerve may be bruised or torn when the cyst lining is removed and as a result you may feel some tingling or numbness in your lip and/or chin. For most people who have tingling or numbness it does get better on its own - although this can take several months. Some people have permanent numbness afterwards.
- If the cyst is very large in size there is a **very small** risk that your jaw may break during or after the surgery and need to be repaired.
- If you wear a denture it may not fit properly following the surgery.

What happens afterwards?

Your surgeon will usually see you again during the first month or so after your surgery. They will check your healing and talk to you about the results from the laboratory. You may need further appointments after this. Your surgeon will usually take x-rays to check on how the bone is healing.

If you have a pack placed during the surgery you will need to have this changed regularly until the cavity has healed.

Although jaw cysts are **not** cancerous, some types of cyst can grow again. If you have one of these cysts you will need regular appointments for check-ups.

This leaflet is available online at <http://www.ucc.ie/en/dentalschool/patients>