

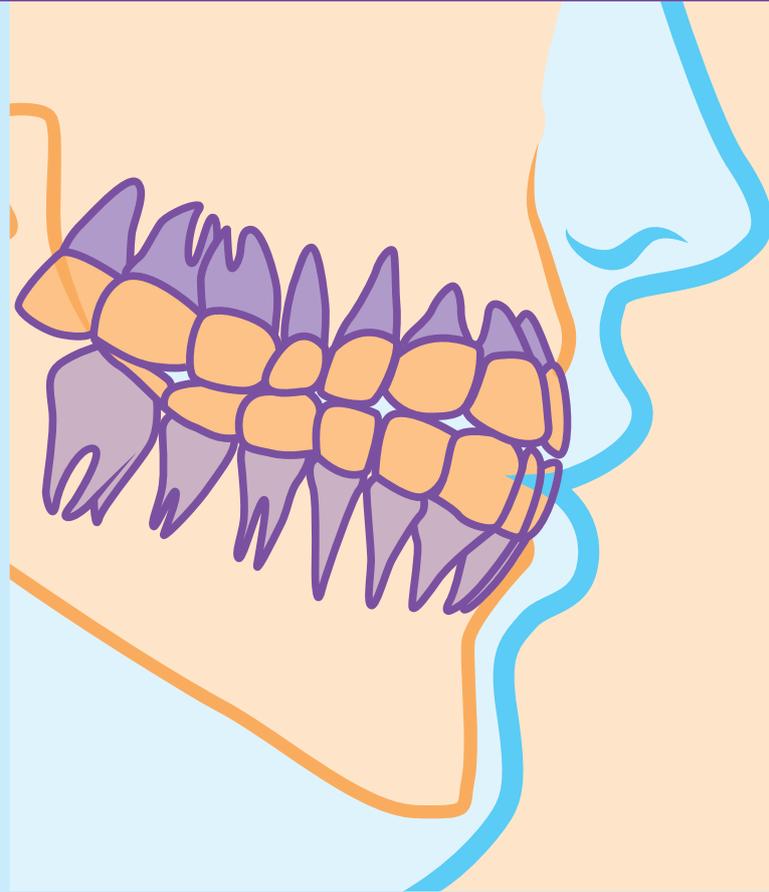
Apicectomy

(surgical treatment of infections at the tip of the root)

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The purpose of this leaflet is to improve your understanding of the apicectomy procedure and contains some answers to frequently asked questions. If you have any further questions or concerns after reading this leaflet, please ask a member of the surgical team looking after your care.



Infection can persist at the tip of the root on one or more teeth. Previously these teeth may have had an abscess and have been root-treated (a dental procedure used to treat infection at the centre of a tooth). This persistent infection doesn't always cause any symptoms. Sometimes, you can have acute pain. But more often, just some discomfort and occasional episodes of swelling, a gumboil or a bad taste. A course of antibiotics may have been prescribed to try to control the infection, but antibiotics are not a permanent cure.

Why do I need treatment?

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

The surgical treatment of infections at the tip of the root is called an apicectomy. Apicectomy is a treatment of last resort. In most cases it is better if your dentist tries to re-root treat the tooth, or refers you to an endodontist, a specialist in carrying out root fillings.

Sometimes it is impossible to improve on the previous root filling, or there may be a metal post inserted into the tooth, which cannot be removed without breaking the root. If this is the case, you may be a candidate for surgery.

What does treatment involve?

In an apicectomy, the infection is cleaned out from the bone, then a small portion of the tip of the root of the tooth is removed and the root end is sealed with a small filling.

It is necessary to make a cut in the gum over the root of the tooth or around the gum margin of several teeth. The gum is then lifted from bone. The area of infection is accessed by removing a small amount of bone over it with a drill. Any infected tissue is thoroughly cleaned away from the tip of the root before removing some of the root tip. The root end is then sealed with a small filling. The gum is stitched back into place with dissolvable stitches that take around two weeks to disappear. Alternatively, your dentist or surgeon may choose to remove them earlier.

What type of anaesthetic is used?

Usually an apicectomy is carried out under a local anaesthetic; an injection into the gum that numbs the area. This anaesthetic will prevent you from feeling any pain during the procedure. If you are particularly anxious, your surgeon may recommend that you have some type of sedation.

If the area of infection around the root is very large, or there is a large cyst around the root, or several teeth to be operated on; a general anaesthetic may be necessary.

What can I expect after the operation?

When the local anaesthetic wears off a few hours after surgery, there will be some discomfort. Your surgeon will discuss painkillers with you. Antibiotics are not usually needed. The discomfort should ease after a few days, but may take a couple of weeks to completely resolve. You may require a day or two off work, during which time you should avoid strenuous exercise.

Some swelling can occur inside and outside the mouth after surgery. This is usually most noticeable for about two days.

What is the after care?

It is important to keep the site of surgery as clean as possible for the first few weeks. If it is difficult to use a toothbrush, the area can be kept free of food debris by gently rinsing with a salt water mouth wash. Dissolve a teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water. Start this on the day after surgery. Repeat this as often as you can, but especially after eating.

