



Patient Information Leaflet Fractured Mandible (Lower Jaw)

Cork University Dental
School & Hospital



This leaflet has been designed to explain your type of fracture 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 fractured mandible?

Your lower jaw (mandible) has been broken (fractured). Your surgeon has found out where the breaks are by examining you and taking x-rays. Most people with a broken jaw need surgery to fix it – but not everybody.

What does the operation involve?

The surgery is done under general anaesthetic (you are fully asleep). Once you are asleep the surgeon will make a cut through the gum inside your mouth. This allows the surgeon to see the break. The broken bone is then put back together and held in place with small metal plates and screws. The gum is stitched back into place with dissolvable stitches that can take two weeks or even longer to fall out. During the same operation, it is often necessary to put wires around your teeth. You will be able to open your mouth when you wake up from surgery. It may be necessary to attach small elastic bands to the wires a day or two later in order to guide your bite into the right position. In some cases, it is necessary to remove damaged or decayed teeth from the area of the break.

What can I expect after the operation?

You will have some **pain** and **swelling**. The first few days after surgery are usually the worst, but it may take a couple of weeks to disappear completely. You will get a prescription for painkillers to take regularly after the surgery.

There is a risk of **infection**, so you will get antibiotics through a vein in your arm when you are in hospital. You will also get a prescription for antibiotics to take when you go home.

It is important to keep your mouth as **clean** as possible for the first few weeks after surgery in order to prevent infection. It may be difficult to clean your teeth around stitches because of soreness. You can clean the area after eating by gently rinsing your mouth with a mouthwash or with warm salty water (dissolve a teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water), starting on the day after surgery.

Although the plates and screws hold your jaw in place it still takes about six weeks for your jaw to heal completely. During this time, you need to eat **soft food** only. Your surgeon will give you advice on this. You must be careful to avoid another injury as it may push your jaw out of position again. Any wires on your teeth will be removed when your surgeon is happy that your fracture has healed. The plates and screws are not usually removed.

Please turn over

How long will I be in hospital?

The number of nights you stay in hospital will depend on whether or not you have other injuries that need to be treated and also on what time of day your surgery takes place. Some people can go home the same day.

Do I need to take any time off?

Depending on the work you do, you may need to take two weeks or so off and avoid strenuous exercise for the same length of time. It is important to remember that you should not drive or operate machinery for 48 hours after your general anaesthetic.

When can I play sports again?

In general, you should wait six weeks before returning to full contact sport.

The usual advice is –

- Weeks 1 – 4 – low intensity exercise to stay fit. For example, walking, gentle exercise bike and so on.
- Week 5 – if you do not have problems, you can return to non-contact training.
- Week 6 – if you do not have problems, you can return to contact training.
- Week 7 – if you do not have problems, you can return to full contact sport.

What are the risks?

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

Risks associated with jaw fracture surgery include:

- Slight **bleeding** from the cuts inside your mouth is common in the first day or so after surgery. 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.
- **Infection** in the gum or bone. Taking your antibiotics will usually prevent this.
- Damage to nearby teeth.
- **Nerve damage** – there is a nerve that runs through a tunnel in the centre of your lower jaw. This nerve gives the feeling to your lower lip, chin and bottom teeth. If it was bruised or torn when your jaw was broken you might already feel some tingling or numbness in your lip or chin. This tingling may also be caused or made worse by surgery. 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.
- **Infected plates** or screws – if this happens, they need to be removed. This can happen soon after your surgery or it may happen many years later. The metal that is used is titanium, which does not set off metal detectors.

Will I need further appointments?

Yes. Your surgeon will need to check on your jaw as it heals. Before you leave hospital you will get an appointment to come back to the clinic for a check-up.

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