

Apicectomy

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of any forthcoming treatment and contains answers to many of the commonly asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation please ask.

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, gum boils or bad taste. You may well 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 will become loose.

What does treatment involve?

Your dentist will have already tried to get rid of the infection by removing the nerve of the tooth and placing a root filling. 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 and then sealing the root with a small filling.

It is necessary to make a small cut in the gum over the root of the tooth and then lift the gum off the bone. The area of infection is uncovered by removing a small amount of bone with a drill. Any infected tissue is thoroughly cleaned away from the tip of the root before 2-3mm of the root tip is removed. The root is sealed with a small filling. The gum is then stitched back into place with dissolvable stitches that take around two weeks to disappear. The whole procedure will take around 30 minutes from start to finish.

What type of anaesthetic is used?

Usually an apicoectomy is carried out under a local anaesthetic, ie an injection into the gum that numbs the area. This anaesthetic will prevent you feeling any pain during the procedure.

What can I expect after the operation?

When the local anaesthetic wears off a few hours after surgery there will be some discomfort. It might also be necessary to take a course of antibiotics. You will be given instructions on how to look after the area following the procedure.

Some swelling can occur both inside and outside the mouth after surgery. This is usually most noticeable for about two days. It is important to keep the site of surgery as clean as possible for the first few weeks after surgery. If it is difficult to use a toothbrush, it is recommended that the area be kept free of food debris by gently rinsing with an alcohol-free mouth wash or warm salt water (dissolve a level teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water) commencing on the day after surgery.

What are the possible problems?

Lifting the gum to uncover the root of the tooth can occasionally lead to a numb feeling in the gum. This usually disappears after a few months. Because the gum is cut it can occasionally shrink 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 seems to have been successfully removed it can sometimes return months or even years later. If this happens it might be necessary to repeat the operation or even remove the tooth.

Further information

More information is available on the Trust website www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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