

Post-Operative Instructions After Tooth Extraction and Bone Grafting

Thank you for trusting us with your care. This handout will guide you through your recovery step by step. Please read it carefully and keep it nearby for the next several days. Following these instructions closely will help you heal comfortably and protect your bone graft for the best possible outcome.

9 Key Topics

From bleeding to diet, we cover everything you need to know.

When to Call Us

Clear warning signs so you always know when to reach out.

Easy to Follow

Simple, plain-language steps designed for a smooth recovery.

What to Expect After Surgery

It is completely normal to experience some discomfort in the hours and days following your procedure. Your body is working hard to begin the healing process, and many of the symptoms you may notice are a natural and expected part of recovery. Understanding what is normal can help ease any worry and allow you to rest with confidence.

Most patients experience mild to moderate pain or soreness around the surgical site, which is typically most noticeable during the first 24 to 48 hours. Swelling is also very common and tends to peak around the second or third day before gradually improving. You may notice some minor bleeding or oozing from the area – this is expected and should slow significantly within the first few hours.

Some patients develop light bruising on the cheek or jaw, which may appear a day or two after surgery. This is harmless and will fade on its own over the following week. If you had a bone graft placed, you may occasionally notice very small white granules in your mouth – these are graft particles and it is normal for a few to come loose. Do not be alarmed if this happens. Simply rinse gently and call our office if you have any concerns.



Mild to Moderate Pain

Normal in the first 1–2 days. Manageable with prescribed or over-the-counter medication.



Swelling for 2–3 Days

Peaks around day 2–3, then gradually goes down. Ice helps in the first 24 hours.



Minor Bleeding or Oozing

A small amount of blood-tinged saliva is expected. It should slow within a few hours.



Bruising

May appear on the cheek or jaw 1–2 days after surgery. Fades on its own within a week.

Controlling Bleeding & Managing Swelling

Controlling Bleeding

After your procedure, your dental team will place a piece of gauze over the surgical site. Biting firmly and steadily on this gauze for 30 to 60 minutes creates the gentle pressure needed to help a blood clot form. The clot is critical – it protects the graft and begins the healing process.

If bleeding or oozing continues after the first piece of gauze is removed, simply fold a fresh piece and bite down again for another 30 minutes. A small amount of pink-tinged saliva is normal for several hours.

- Bite firmly on gauze for 30–60 minutes
- Replace gauze if bleeding continues
- Avoid spitting, rinsing, or using straws for the first 24 hours – these actions can dislodge the clot
- If heavy bleeding persists beyond 2 hours, call our office

Managing Swelling

Swelling is one of the most common parts of recovery and usually reaches its peak around the second or third day before beginning to go down. Using ice during the first 24 hours is one of the most effective ways to minimize swelling before it gets worse.

Keep your head elevated while resting or sleeping – prop yourself up with an extra pillow. Lying completely flat can increase blood flow to the area and worsen swelling overnight.

- Apply an ice pack to the **outside** of the face – never directly on the skin
- Use a 20-minutes-on / 20-minutes-off cycle for the first 24 hours
- After 24 hours, switch to warm compresses if swelling persists
- Keep your head elevated above heart level when resting
- Do not apply heat in the first 24 hours – it can increase swelling

Taking Your Medications

Your medications play an important role in keeping you comfortable and preventing infection as your body heals. It is essential that you take all prescribed medications exactly as directed — even if you are feeling better sooner than expected. Stopping antibiotics early, for example, can allow bacteria to return and may lead to infection around the graft site.

If you were prescribed a pain reliever, take it on a schedule for the first 24 to 48 hours rather than waiting until the pain becomes severe. It is much easier to stay ahead of discomfort than to try to catch up once it has built up. Anti-inflammatory medications like ibuprofen are especially helpful because they reduce both pain and swelling at the same time.

Always take medications with food or a full glass of water to protect your stomach, unless your doctor has told you otherwise. If you experience any unusual reactions — such as a rash, difficulty breathing, or stomach pain — stop the medication and contact us right away.



Antibiotics

If prescribed, complete the **full course** even if you feel fine. Do not skip doses. Antibiotics protect the bone graft from infection during the critical early healing phase.



Pain Medication


Take as needed, but start within the first few hours after surgery while the local anesthetic is still wearing off. Over-the-counter ibuprofen or acetaminophen may also be recommended.



Anti-Inflammatory Medication

If recommended, these help reduce swelling and discomfort together. Take with food. Do not combine with other NSAIDs without asking our team first.



 **Tip:** Set a phone alarm or use a pill organizer to help you stay on schedule with your medications, especially during the first 48–72 hours when consistency matters most.

Oral Hygiene After Surgery

Keeping your mouth clean after surgery is important for healing — but you need to be gentle around the surgical site. During the first 24 hours, do **not** rinse, spit forcefully, or disturb the area in any way. The blood clot that forms over the graft site is fragile and must be protected during these critical early hours.

Starting the day after surgery, you can begin rinsing gently with warm saltwater. To make the rinse, dissolve half a teaspoon of table salt in a cup of warm water. Tilt your head slowly from side to side and let the rinse flow over the area — do not swish forcefully. Repeat this rinse two to three times a day, especially after meals, to keep the area clean and reduce the risk of infection.

You may continue brushing your other teeth normally, but avoid the surgical area for several days. Be very careful not to bump the graft site with your toothbrush. If you were given a prescription mouth rinse, use it as directed by our team. Do not use commercial mouthwashes containing alcohol, as these can irritate the healing tissue and dry out the area.

→ Day of Surgery

No rinsing, no spitting, no touching the area. Let the clot form undisturbed. You may gently blot around your mouth with a soft cloth.

→ Day After Surgery

Begin gentle warm saltwater rinses — ½ teaspoon salt in a cup of warm water, 2–3 times daily and after eating. Let it flow, do not swish hard.

→ Days 2 Through 7

Continue saltwater rinses. Resume brushing all other teeth normally. Avoid the surgical area with your toothbrush. Use any prescribed rinse as directed.

Eating and Drinking During Recovery

What you eat and drink over the next several days can make a big difference in how well you heal. The right foods will keep you nourished and comfortable without putting stress on the surgical site. The wrong foods can irritate the area, introduce bacteria, or physically dislodge the graft material – so it is worth being thoughtful about your diet during this time.



Stick to soft, easy-to-chew foods for at least the first three to five days, and try to chew on the opposite side of your mouth whenever possible. Make sure you are eating enough – good nutrition supports your immune system and speeds healing. If chewing anything feels uncomfortable, smoothies and protein shakes can be a great way to get nutrients without any chewing at all. Just remember: **no straws**.

✓ Foods to Enjoy

- Yogurt and soft cheeses
- Scrambled or soft-boiled eggs
- Soups and broths (not too hot)
- Mashed potatoes or sweet potatoes
- Oatmeal and soft cooked grains
- Smoothies (no straw – use a spoon)
- Bananas, avocado, and soft fruit
- Soft fish or well-cooked chicken
- Pudding, applesauce, and ice cream

✗ Foods and Habits to Avoid

- Hard, crunchy foods – chips, crackers, nuts, raw vegetables
- Spicy or acidic foods that can irritate the area
- Very hot foods or beverages that can dissolve the clot
- Alcohol for at least 48 hours (longer if on antibiotics)
- Carbonated drinks – the bubbles can disturb healing
- Using a straw for at least 5–7 days – the suction is dangerous for the graft
- Chewing directly over the surgical site

  **No straws for at least 5–7 days.** The suction created by using a straw – even gently – can dislodge the blood clot and disrupt the bone graft. This is one of the most important rules to follow.

Important Precautions to Protect Your Graft

Bone grafts are delicate in the early stages of healing, and certain activities or habits can seriously interfere with the process. Taking a few extra precautions during the first one to two weeks will protect your investment in your health and give your graft the best possible chance of success.

The most critical precaution is to **avoid smoking or vaping** for at least one to two weeks after surgery – and ideally longer. Tobacco products dramatically reduce blood flow to the healing tissues and introduce harmful chemicals that interfere with bone regeneration. Patients who smoke after bone grafting have a significantly higher risk of graft failure and infection. If you need help quitting or cutting back, please let us know – we are here to support you.

Physical exertion is also something to limit in the days immediately following surgery. Strenuous activity raises your blood pressure, which can cause renewed bleeding and increase swelling. Give yourself permission to rest. Most patients can gradually return to light activity after 48 to 72 hours and resume normal exercise after about a week, depending on how healing progresses.



No Smoking or Vaping

Avoid for at least 1–2 weeks. Smoking greatly increases the risk of graft failure and infection.



Limit Physical Activity

Rest for 2–3 days. Avoid heavy lifting, running, or anything that raises your heart rate significantly.



Do Not Touch the Graft Area

Keep fingers and tongue away from the surgical site. Touching it can introduce bacteria and disturb the graft.



Avoid Alcohol

Do not drink alcohol for at least 48 hours, or longer if you are taking antibiotics or prescription pain medications.

When to Contact Our Office

Most recoveries go smoothly, and the symptoms you experience in the first few days are usually normal and manageable. However, there are certain signs that should prompt you to call our office right away. We would always rather hear from you and reassure you than have you worry alone — so please do not hesitate to reach out if something does not feel right.

Pain that is getting **worse** after the first few days — rather than gradually improving — can sometimes be a sign of a condition called dry socket, which occurs when the blood clot is lost or fails to form properly. Dry socket is very treatable, but it does require prompt attention from our team. Do not try to manage worsening pain on your own without calling us first.

● Severe or Worsening Pain

Pain that intensifies after day 3–4 instead of improving may indicate dry socket or infection. Call us — this is very treatable when caught early.

● Persistent or Heavy Bleeding

Some oozing is normal, but if you are soaking through gauze consistently after 2–3 hours, or bleeding restarts heavily, call us immediately.

● Fever Over 101°F (38.3°C)

A low-grade temperature can be normal in the first 24 hours, but a persistent or rising fever may signal infection. Contact us right away.

● Significant Swelling After Day 3–4

Swelling should start improving by day 3. If it is getting larger or spreading, or if you feel pressure building up under the skin, please call us.

● Signs of Infection

Bad taste that does not go away, pus or discharge from the site, or foul odor that is getting worse — these are signs of infection that need prompt care.



When in doubt, call us. Our team is here to help you heal with confidence. Never feel like a question is too small — your recovery matters to us.

Your Follow-Up Appointment

Healing after a tooth extraction and bone graft is a gradual process that we want to monitor closely. Depending on your specific procedure, we may schedule one or more follow-up visits in the coming weeks to check on how your graft is integrating and to make sure everything is progressing as expected. These appointments are an important part of your care — please do not skip them even if you feel fine.

At your follow-up visit, we will examine the surgical site, assess the health of the surrounding gum tissue, and take any necessary X-rays to evaluate the bone graft. If you had sutures placed, we will also check whether they need to be removed. Some sutures are dissolvable and will fall out on their own within one to two weeks — others may need to be taken out by our team at your follow-up visit.

If you have any concerns or notice anything unusual before your scheduled follow-up, please do not wait — call our office and we will get you seen as soon as possible. Our goal is to ensure that your bone graft heals fully and successfully, setting the foundation for whatever next steps your treatment plan includes, whether that is a dental implant or other restorative work.



We are honored to be part of your care. If you have any questions — now or any time during your recovery — please call our office. Wishing you a smooth, comfortable, and successful healing journey. ❤️