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Post-Operative Instructions

Anesthetics

The length of time you experience numbness varies, depending on the type of anesthetic you've received. While your mouth is numb, you'll want to be careful not to bite your cheek, lip or tongue. The numbness should subside within a few hours. If it doesn't subside, contact your oral surgeon.

Bleeding

Your oral surgeon will place a gauze pack on the extraction site to stop the bleeding. This gauze pack should be left in place for 30 to 40 minutes after you leave the oral surgeon's office. Do not chew on the pack. There may be some bleeding or oozing after the pack is removed. If so, follow this procedure:

1. Fold a piece of clean gauze into a pad thick enough to bite on.
2. Apply moderate pressure by closing the teeth firmly over the pad. Maintain this pressure for about 30 minutes. If the pad becomes soaked with blood, replace it with a clean one as necessary. You will probably have to change the gauze packs two to three times.
3. Do not suck on the extraction site.
4. A slight amount of blood may leak at the extraction site until a clot forms. However, if heavy bleeding continues, call your oral surgeon. (Remember, though, a lot of saliva and a little blood can look like a lot of bleeding.)

The Blood Clot

After an extraction, a blood clot forms in the tooth socket. This clot is an important part of the normal healing process. You should therefore avoid activities that might disturb the clot. Here's how to protect it:

1. Do not smoke, or rinse your mouth vigorously, or drink through a straw for 24 hours. These activities create suction in the mouth, which could dislodge the clot and delay healing.
2. Do not clean the teeth next to the healing tooth socket for the rest of the day. You should, however, brush and floss your other teeth thoroughly. *Gently* rinse your mouth afterward.
3. Limit strenuous activity for 24 hours after the extraction. This will reduce bleeding and help the blood clot to form.
4. If you have sutures that require removal, your oral surgeon will instruct you when to return. Occasionally, a dry socket occurs when the blood clot breaks down earlier than normal. A dressing may be placed in the socket to protect it until the socket heals.

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Medication

Your oral surgeon may prescribe medication to control pain and prevent infection. Use it only as directed. If the medication prescribed does not seem to work for you, do not increase the dosage. If you have prolonged or severe pain, swelling, bleeding or fever, call your oral surgeon immediately. He or she will give you exact instructions on how to care for your problem. While taking the prescribed pain medication, you are not allowed to drive or operate heavy machinery unless otherwise instructed by your oral surgeon.

Swelling and pain

After a tooth is removed, you may have some discomfort and notice some swelling. You can help reduce swelling and pain by applying cold compresses to the face. An ice bag can be used periodically. Apply the ice bag to the face outside the surgical site for 10 minutes and then take off for 10 minutes. Repeat this.

Diet

After the extraction, drink lots of liquids and eat soft, nutritious foods. Avoid alcoholic beverages and hot liquids. Begin eating solid foods the next day or as soon as you can chew comfortably. For about two days, try to chew food on the side opposite the extraction site. Do not eat anything small enough to get lodged in the wound such as rice, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.. for at least two weeks. If you are troubled by nausea and vomiting, call your oral surgeon for advice.

Rinsing

The day after the extraction, you may gently rinse your mouth with warm salt water (half a teaspoon salt in an 8oz. glass of warm water). Rinsing after meals is important to keep food particles out of the extraction site, but remember not to rinse your mouth vigorously. Do not use any commercial mouthwash for two weeks after your surgery.

Oral Hygiene

It is important to continue to brush thoroughly twice a day using an ADA-accepted fluoride toothpaste, and floss or clean in between your teeth with interdental cleaners, daily. The tongue should also be brushed. This will help eliminate the bad breath and unpleasant taste that is common after an extraction. Always use a soft-bristled brush so that you do not injure the tissues in your mouth. Remember that you have just had surgery. Be kind to yourself.