

Jaw (Orthognathic) Surgery: Recovering at Home



You just had orthognathic surgery. This is treatment that reshapes the jaws to improve their form and function. Your job now is to keep yourself comfortable and help your body heal quickly. Make sure to get plenty of calories and protein. Get up and move around, but don't do any strenuous activity. Make sure to get lots of rest. Keep your mouth and teeth clean to help the cuts (incisions) heal.

Controlling swelling and pain

For the first few days, swelling will likely get worse. It should then start to ease. To reduce swelling and pain:

- Sit or lie down with your head and shoulders higher than your heart.
- Apply an ice pack to your face for 10 minutes at a time, with breaks of at least 5 minutes in between. To make an ice pack, put ice cubes in a plastic bag that seals at the top. Wrap the bag in a clean, thin towel or cloth. Never put an ice pack directly on your skin.
- Use pain medicines as advised.

Nutrition and fluids

You will need to get enough nutrition, which may be harder while you're not able to chew. Follow the discharge instructions carefully. Contact your provider right away if you have any problems eating or drinking.

If your jaw was wired shut, you will have challenges eating. A wired jaw can lead to poor nutrition, weight loss, and poor oral hygiene. If it was wired shut because of an injury, your body will need more energy and nutrition to heal. Ask your provider for advice on managing eating, drinking, and brushing your teeth. You may need a liquid diet or non-chewing diet until the teeth are released and some healing has occurred. Your jaw wired may last for several weeks.

You also need fluids to help prevent dehydration and nausea. Before adding anything to your diet, ask your provider. For calories, protein, and fluids, try total-nutrition drinks, protein powders, soups, milkshakes, and other blended foods. Don't use a straw. The suction can stress the incisions in your mouth. Instead, use a glass or a sippy cup designed for young children. Once you can chew again, eat soft foods that can be cut with a spoon or fork. As you heal, you'll slowly return to your normal eating habits.

Keeping your mouth and teeth clean

To keep your teeth as clean as possible:

- If you can't open your jaws, brush the front surfaces of your teeth with a baby toothbrush.
- If a fluoride toothpaste or mouth rinse is prescribed, use it as directed.
- If your surgeon advises it, start using an oral irrigator about 10 days after surgery.
- Aim to get back to brushing and flossing normally as soon as you can.
- If your jaw is wired, follow your discharge instructions for brushing your teeth

When to call your surgeon

If you have any of the following problems, call your surgeon:

- Severe bleeding

- Pain that can't be controlled
- Nausea or vomiting that can't be controlled
- Swelling that keeps getting worse after 3 to 4 days
- Trouble with breathing or swallowing
- A fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as advised

Go to the emergency department or call 911 if your healthcare provider's office is closed.

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