

Post-Operative Instructions: Orthognathic Surgery (Jaw Surgery)

Thank you for entrusting us with your surgical care. Proper post-operative management is essential for a smooth recovery and successful long-term outcome. This handout outlines what to expect and how to care for yourself after **orthognathic surgery** (e.g., upper jaw, lower jaw, or double jaw surgery).



Immediately After Surgery: In the Hospital

You will wake up in the recovery area after surgery, with close monitoring by the medical team. You may have:

- **Facial swelling**
 - **Mild bleeding from the nose or mouth**
 - **Sore throat or hoarseness** (from breathing tube)
 - **Tightness from jaw repositioning and elastics**
 - **IV line** for fluids and medications
 - **Drains or nasal splints** (in some cases)
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First Night in the Hospital

- You will remain in the hospital overnight (or longer depending on your case).
- Pain and nausea are controlled with IV medications.
- You may begin taking small sips of clear liquids.
- Nurses will assist you with walking, breathing exercises, and oral care.

- Elastic bands or splints may be in place to help guide the new bite position.
 - You will be closely monitored for airway safety, swelling, and bleeding.
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What to Expect Over the 6-Week Recovery Period

◆ Week 1–2: Acute Recovery Phase

- **Swelling and bruising** peak during the first 3–5 days.
- You may experience **nasal congestion**, **facial tightness**, and **minor bleeding**.
- **Pain is expected** but manageable with medication.
- **Strict soft, no-chew diet** (see guidelines below).
- Oral hygiene and activity restrictions are essential.

◆ Week 3–4: Early Healing

- Swelling gradually improves.
- Energy levels begin to return.
- You will remain on a soft diet.
- Elastic bands or bite splints may still be in place.

◆ Week 5–6: Continued Healing

- Most bruising will have resolved.
- Swelling may still be present but significantly reduced.
- Gradual increase in activity and speech function.
- You will continue your no-chew diet through week 6.

- Return to work or school may be possible depending on your recovery.
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Soft, No-Chew Diet (6 Weeks Total)

To protect the surgical sites and allow bone healing, follow a **strict no-chew diet until your surgeon instructs you otherwise**:

Allowed Foods:

- Smoothies, yogurt, pudding, applesauce
- Mashed potatoes, scrambled eggs, oatmeal
- Protein shakes, blended soups, pureed vegetables
- Soft pasta (well-cooked and mashed), cottage cheese

Avoid:

- Anything requiring chewing or biting (meats, raw vegetables, nuts)
- Sticky, crunchy, spicy, or hot foods
- Straws (for the two weeks)

Stay hydrated — sip water frequently throughout the day.

It is helpful to stock up on protein shakes or meal replacement shakes like Ensure during the initial healing phase. Plastic condiment bottles can be used to help with eating during the first one to two weeks when opening is more limited.

Oral Hygiene Instructions

- Begin **gentle rinsing** with saltwater (1/2 tsp salt in 8 oz water) 3–5 times per day starting 24 hours after surgery.

- Use a **soft-bristled toothbrush** on non-surgical areas; avoid direct brushing of incisions for 1–2 weeks. You should brush at least 3 times per day.
 - A prescription mouth rinse called chlorhexidine or Peridex will be prescribed. Use this twice daily.
 - Do not use electric toothbrushes or water flossers unless instructed.
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Medications

- **Take all medications** exactly as prescribed (pain relievers, antibiotics, anti-nausea, etc.)
 - You may alternate ibuprofen (400-600 mg every 6 hours, not exceeding 3200 mg per day) and acetaminophen (500-1000 mg every 6 hours, not exceeding 4000 mg per day). If you have been prescribed a narcotic pain medication use it for breakthrough pain only.
 - Begin **pain medication before the anesthesia wears off** to stay ahead of discomfort.
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Swelling, Bruising, and Nasal Congestion

- **Cold compresses** (20 min on/20 min off) for the first 48–72 hours help reduce swelling.
 - Keep your **head elevated** while resting and sleeping for 1–2 weeks.
 - Nasal stuffiness and mild bleeding are common, especially after upper jaw surgery.
 - Use saline nasal spray and humidifiers to help breathing.
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Jaw Elastics or Splints

- You may have **elastics or a bite splint** to help guide healing and align the bite.
- Do not remove elastics unless instructed.

- Your surgeon or orthodontist will monitor and adjust them during follow-up visits.
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Activity Restrictions

- Rest and limit activity for the first 7–10 days.
 - No heavy lifting, bending over, or strenuous exercise for 3–4 weeks.
 - Avoid smoking, vaping, or alcohol for at least 6 weeks — these delay healing and increase risk of complications.
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Call Our Office If You Experience:

- Excessive bleeding or worsening swelling
 - Fever over 101°F (38.3°C)
 - Difficulty breathing or swallowing
 - Severe pain not relieved by medication
 - Vomiting that prevents hydration
 - Pus, foul odor, or signs of infection
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Follow-Up Appointments

- Your first post-op visit is usually scheduled **within 5–7 days** after surgery.
 - Additional visits will be scheduled to monitor healing, remove sutures (if needed), and coordinate with your orthodontist.
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We're Here to Support You

Your recovery is a team effort. Follow these instructions closely, and don't hesitate to contact us with any concerns. We're here to guide you through every step toward a successful, healthy recovery.

 **Contact us with questions or to confirm appointments.**

St. Matthew's OMS

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