



Patient Information Leaflet **Orthognathic (Jaw) Surgery** Cork University Dental School & Hospital



This leaflet has been designed to explain orthognathic surgery and it contains answers to many frequently asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer, or if you would like further information, please ask us.

Why is this surgery for?

You have been referred by your orthodontist for orthognathic (jaw) surgery. The purpose of this surgery is to move one or both of your jaws to a new position.

Why do I need this surgery?

It has not been possible to correct your teeth and how they bite together with orthodontics (braces) alone. This is because the bones of your face and jaws are out of balance with one another. Surgery will change this balance and allow your teeth to bite together in the way that you and your orthodontist have planned.

What does the operation involve?

The surgery will take place under a general anaesthetic - you will be completely asleep. The operation is all carried out inside your mouth so that there are no visible scars on the skin of your face. A cut is made through the gum above your upper teeth and/or behind your lower teeth to uncover the jawbone. The jaw is then cut with a small saw to allow it to be broken in a controlled way. It is then moved into its new position and held in place with small metal plates and screws. The gum is stitched back into place with dissolvable stitches that can take two weeks or more to fall out.

How long will I be in hospital?

This will vary from person to person but most patients spend one, sometimes two, nights in hospital after their operation.

What can I expect after the operation?

Perhaps surprisingly, it is not a particularly painful operation but it is still likely to be sore and you will get regular painkillers. The discomfort will be at its worst in the first few days, although it may take a couple of weeks to completely disappear. You will continue to take your painkillers regularly when you go home. It is also necessary to make sure that the area heals without any infection and so you will be given antibiotics through a vein in your arm whilst you are in hospital. You will need to stay in hospital for at least one night.

Immediately after the operation your face will be very swollen and feel tight. Your jaws will be stiff and you will find that you cannot open your mouth widely. If you have upper jaw surgery then your nose is often blocked after the operation and you may have to breathe through your mouth. Your throat may also be uncomfortable and swallowing can be difficult at first. Swelling and bruising varies a lot from one person to another but is generally at its worst on the second or third day after the operation. The swelling can be reduced by using cold packs and sleeping propped upright for a

few days. Most of the swelling will disappear in two weeks. There is often some mild swelling that can take several months to disappear, although only you and your family are likely to notice this.

Can I eat normally after surgery?

For the first day or two you may only want liquids but very quickly you should be able to manage soft food and then gradually build up to normal food over a few weeks.

Do I need to take any time off work or school?

This varies a lot from one person to another and also depends on what kind of job you do. We advise that most people have about three weeks off. It is important to remember that you will not be able to drive or operate machinery for 48 hours after your general anaesthetic.

What are the risks?

There are some risks with any operation. Fortunately with this type of surgery problems are rare and may not happen to you. However it is important that you are aware of them and have the opportunity to discuss them with your surgeon.

- Bleeding – some oozing from the cuts inside your mouth on the night of operation is normal. Often you will notice slight bleeding from your nose as well. This may take a week or so to settle. Significant bleeding is very unusual. If it happens it can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the area for 10 minutes with a rolled up handkerchief or gauze.
- Numbness – your lips, tongue or cheek will be numb and tingly after the operation, similar to the sensation after having an injection at the dentist. This feeling may take several weeks to disappear. In a few people the change in sensation can be permanent.
- Infection – the small plates and screws that hold your jaw in its new position are left in place permanently. Occasionally they get infected and need to be removed. If this happens it is not normally until several months after the surgery. The metal that is used is titanium which does not set off metal detectors in airports etc.
- Adjustment of your bite – in the weeks after surgery it is often necessary to put elastic bands on your orthodontic braces to guide your bite into its new position. Very rarely, a second small operation may be required to reposition the fixing plates and screws if your new bite is not quite right.

Will I need further appointments?

Yes. Appointments will be arranged before you leave hospital for you to see both your surgeon and your orthodontist.

This leaflet is available online at <http://www.ucc.ie/en/dentalschool/patients>