Repair of fractured jaw

Definition and explanation
The operation to repair a broken (fractured) jaw is called an open reduction and internal fixation (ORIF).

The lower jaw is called the mandible, and the upper jaw is called the maxilla. The fracture sites are exposed by making a cut (incision) on the inside of your mouth through the gum below your lower teeth (for mandible) or above your upper teeth (for maxilla). The broken bones are put back together 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. Any diseased or damaged teeth may also be removed. An x-ray to check the position of the repaired jaw is done the day after surgery.

Sometimes, it is necessary to place wires or metal bars around your teeth, to which elastic bands can be attached. These guide your bite into the correct position, and the bands are put in the day after surgery. It takes about six weeks for the jaw to heal completely.

Any metal work used in surgery tends to be of titanium, which does not set off metal detectors such as those used in airport security.

Discharge advice
• Your doctor will give you specific advice on your recovery period but in general you will need to rest at home for two weeks. If you need a sick certificate, please ask the medical staff before you leave the ward.
• You will be given medication for pain relief and you may have been given a course of antibiotics. These antibiotics help to reduce the risk of developing an infection in the jaw. The nurses will discuss with you how and when these should be taken. A cold compress and sleeping or resting propped-up can both help ease any pain and swelling.
• Follow a soft diet at first to avoid pain and strain from chewing and eat healthily to maximise your recovery.
• Keep your mouth as clean as possible to help prevent infection. Use any given mouthwash as prescribed or warm salt water (one teaspoon of salt in one glass of warm water) to rinse away any food debris and do so three to four times per day. Brush your teeth (or those you can reach) at least twice a day. A child toothbrush is smaller and may make this easier.
• Avoid or reduce smoking as smoking affects the body's ability to heal and it can irritate the incision site inside your mouth. Staff can advise you on methods of quitting, give you aids to help you quit (e.g., nicotine patches) and provide contacts for support groups.
• Should the incision site in your mouth bleed, apply pressure with a clean rolled-up handkerchief or gauze over the area for about ten minutes.
• Due to bruising of the nerve supply, either due to the original injury or the effects of surgery, you may experience tingling or numbness in the affected area. For lower-jaw fractures numbness may be in the lower lip, chin and bottom teeth. For upper-jaw fractures, numbness may be felt in the top lip. This can take several weeks to disappear.
• Avoid contact sports for six weeks (or as advised) due to the risk of injury or trauma to the jaw.
• Contact F5 ward if you have any concerns following discharge or if you experience any increased pain and/or swelling to the jaw or mouth, raised temperature or bleeding.
Contact information

F5 ward: 023 8120 6511
023 8120 4644

NHS 111: 111

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or audio, please call 023 8120 4688 for help.