Apicectomy

What is an Apicectomy?

An apicectomy is a minor surgical procedure to remove the top of the root of a dead tooth and then seal the end with a filling.

Why would I need an Apicectomy?

When a tooth is badly decayed, has a large filling or receives a blow, for example, in an accident, the soft tissues within it (the pulp) may die. This dead tissue must be removed to prevent infection and this is undertaken by a procedure called root canal treatment. For further information on Root Canal Treatment, ask for a copy of our Tell Me About Root Canal Treatment leaflet. Sometimes, this treatment is unsuccessful or not possible and the infection persists at the tip of the root. This may sometimes cause pain and may also result in discharge of pus from the gum above the tooth which is sometimes called a gumboil. An apicectomy is the operation designed to remove this infected part of the root tip. The apicectomy gives an alternative to having the tooth extracted.

I’m not in pain so why does anything need to be done?

Even though you may not be experiencing any pain, it is important to follow up with your treatment to prevent the infection spreading. If infection is left untreated it can make you feel poorly.

What happens during an Apicectomy?

The procedure involves making a small incision in the gum above the tooth and the end of the root is cleaned and trimmed. Sometimes an additional seal (a retrograde root filling) is added to the end of the root. An apicectomy is usually carried out under a local anaesthetic, but sometimes sedation or a general anaesthetic may be required. Your dentist will advise you on this. The process takes approximately 20-30 minutes.

How will I feel after?

You may feel some discomfort in the area for about 48 hours after the treatment and your dentist will be able to advise you on suitable painkillers. Sutures (stitches) will be required in order to close the incision. There may also be bruising and swelling of the area for 2-3 days but this will subside slowly and is part of the healing process. You should plan to have a very quiet day after the treatment and the next day as well if possible. Any exercise, smoking, drinking of alcohol or hot drinks is not advisable for two days. Following the treatment, ice packs applied to the face for 10 minutes every hour for the rest of the day will help control the swelling and bruising. A mouthwash started the day before
treatment and continued for one week after will help the healing by keeping the area clean. Your dentist will advise on which one to use.

**What about aftercare?**

You dentist may have decided to use resorbable sutures which will dissolve after about 10 days. However, if your dentist has chosen not to use this kind of suture, an appointment will be arranged for you to go back to have them removed after about 7-10 days.

**What about the long term?**

You will need to come back after 3-6 months so your dentist can ensure that the procedure has been effective and an x-ray may also be taken to check that the area around the root is healing satisfactorily.

Your dentist will give you some idea as to the chances of success with the treatment, which in most situations is very successful.

**How much will it cost?**

Costs can vary so before you start any treatment, always get a treatment plan and an estimate of charges from your dentist.

**Need further advice?**

The Dental Helpline is the Foundation’s own confidential advice service. Qualified dental professionals are available to answer your questions personally from 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday.

The British Dental Health Foundation is an independent, UK based charity dedicated to promoting the benefits of good oral health to the public throughout the world. The Foundation promotes three key messages:

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste
- Cut down on how often you have sugary snacks and drinks
- Visit your dentist as often as he or she recommends (NICE Guidelines)