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ORTHOGNATHIC INFORMATION LEAFLET

ORTHOGNATHIC (JAW) SURGERY

You MUST read this leaflet before you can start any treatment. It is part of your consent process and you will be asked to sign a form stating that you have read and understood this information before we operate on you. If you are unable to confirm this, we may be unable to proceed with your treatment.

What does Orthognathic (jaw) Surgery address?

Orthognathic surgery aims to correct functional problems with the jaws and teeth. Depending on the type and extent of the surgery, treatment will aim to improve the position of the bite and chewing between the jaws. In more complex cases it may improve speech, breathing, and help to balance the appearance of the face. This type of surgery has been shown to improve quality of life as a result of better function, increased self-esteem and confidence.

Do I need Jaw Surgery?

That depends. There are some circumstances where if it is not carried out, there may be long-term detrimental effects on the teeth, gums and jaws that may cause substantial disability in your overall health and quality of life later on. Your consultants will advise you on all options, but the final decision is always yours.

We offer this service to you if you want it and if you fit certain criteria, which indicate that your bite, chewing function, speech and breathing can be improved through a combination of braces and surgery. We also offer it if your bite and appearance are felt not to be normal as a result of growth problems resulting in disproportions between the jaws, facial asymmetries, skew or long/short faces. It may also help following facial trauma, birth defects such as cleft lip and palate and in some circumstances to address sleep apnoea.

Information for patients

If you wish, you may ask to speak in private to a patient who has had this treatment about their experience.

Is there an age limit to these procedures?

There is no set upper age limit for these procedures. However, not everyone may be suitable for this. We would need to talk and see what you might require, if you fit the criteria and if your needs can be met. Usually there is a lower age limit and we don't carry out orthognathic surgery before the age of 16 in women and 18 in men as there may still be residual growth in your jaws and nose.

What is my journey for Othognathic surgery?

Surgery is the culminating point in your treatment and is rarely done first. Prior to this you would have probably visited your dentist or GP with some complaint relating either to your teeth or position of your jaws/face and they would have referred you onwards to one of our consultant orthodontists or surgeons. Depending on the initial conversation, your needs and whether you fulfil certain criteria, you will be referred into a joint orthognathic/facial deformity clinic.

Frequently asked questions:

1. Why do I need jaw surgery? Can't you fix my bite with braces alone?

You would be asking this question if you are not bothered by your facial appearance, but because your teeth are overcrowded, you have protruding upper teeth or have an underbite/overbite or other dental malocclusions.

The reason teeth are often overcrowded is because the jaws are too small to facilitate all of them. This problem can often be remedied with braces alone, and for this you do not need hospital-based orthodontics or surgery and your case can be managed in the community. We will tell you if that is the case.

However, when a jaw is too small or too big in relation to the other jaw together with overcrowding or other malocclusions, braces alone cannot usually remedy the problem effectively because even if teeth are aligned (made straight), your top and bottom teeth may not fit together.

In mild cases, if this problem is not correctly identified, or if the primary care orthodontist chooses to 'camouflage' the problem with your informed consent, be aware that there may be a sub-optimal result in the final facial appearance and possible relative stability of the orthodontics. So long as you are aware of this, and you elect to go in that direction,

2. Why do I need braces and will surgery alone not suffice?

You would be asking this question if you were not too bothered about the position of your teeth, but you were bothered by, for example a protruding or retruding jaw, an open bite, a skew face, or some other facial problem.

Although the operation is to your jaws and face, braces are necessary in the overwhelming number of cases for several reasons:

Firstly, it is rare to have a disproportion or a distortion in your jaws/face and not have a dental malocclusion (overcrowding of teeth, scissor bite, protruding teeth etc.). If these dental problems are not corrected, it is very difficult to put your jaws surgically in a position that will be comfortable for you, in which your teeth will bite correctly and comfortably for chewing. Also, the surgical result will be less stable and finally we will not get the maximum correction possible to your face.

The three fold purpose of orthodontics for jaw surgery is:

- a. To change the position of the teeth to where they best belong relative to the underlying bone, and relative to the surgical movements needed.
- b. To make your teeth straight.
- c. To position the teeth in the jaws so as to allow them to meet as close as perfect during and after the operation.

How and when does my joint orthodontic/surgical treatment start?

In almost all cases, the treatment commences with orthodontics, after the surgeon and orthodontic consultants have decided on a treatment plan, have discussed what is involved with you, and you understand why you are having the treatment, as explained above.

Your orthodontist will need to see you every four to six weeks to adjust the braces on your teeth. If your oral hygiene is poor or you do not keep appointments for your braces, it is at our discretion to discontinue the treatment. Your braces stay on before, during and after the operation for several months until your orthodontic treatment is completed.

If it is decided that you will be having surgery to your bottom jaw, your bottom wisdom teeth are usually removed at least nine months before the surgery takes place or often before orthodontics is even commenced.

When will I be operated on?

You will be having the operation to your jaws approximately eighteen months to two years after commencement of orthodontics.

A few weeks prior to the operation, we will see you to confirm the final surgical treatment plan. Impressions and photographs will be taken and the technician will be calling you in to make some plastic wafers to fit your teeth, which are surgical guides for the operation.

You will be sent a letter to come to hospital for blood tests before surgery.

How should I prepare for the operation?

It is advisable to have a blender for your food for the first few days and a baby tooth brush. A supply of soluble paracetamol and Ibuprofen is very useful, provided you are not allergic to any of these or there is no known contra-indication to you taking these.

It is imperative that you brush your teeth well and that your oral hygiene is immaculate otherwise the surgeon will cancel your operation. If your mouth is not clean, the risk of infection rises substantially.

If you smoke, you must stop six weeks before the procedure and not start again for at least three months after. Smoking increases the risk of infection in your jaws, pneumonia and other complications substantially.

Under no circumstances are you to take herbal or homeopathic medication at least a month before your surgery.

If you are on contraceptive medication, you must take alternative methods of precaution over your next cycle as the medication you are given during the operation interferes with the contraceptive hormones and you may fall pregnant if you are sexually active. If you think you may be pregnant or you are not sure, speak to the doctors about it, as the anaesthetic and procedure may have detrimental effects on a developing baby.

As a patient, what do I do on the day of the operation? What are my responsibilities?

Ensure that you tell the surgeon and anaesthetist of any medical problems or any medication taken, no matter how trivial or unrelated you think this may be.

The nurses will admit you and you will change into a hospital gown. It is mandatory that all under wear is removed as well as all head scarves, make-up, lip-stick, nail polish, nose studs, and any other body piercings, otherwise you will not be operated on. This is for your safety. If there are piercings in private parts of your body and you choose to leave these there, be aware that these may cause electrical burns to you from the diathermy used during the operation and your medical team will not be aware of this. Therefore it is your responsibility to remove these.

What does the surgeon do during the operation?

This depends on what you are having done and it is complex, but we have outlined below what patients normally ask us in the clinic.

You will be put to sleep under a general anaesthetic and you will not be aware of anything. The whole operation will take place within the mouth for the jaw osteotomies in orthognathic surgery, other than two small cuts on either side of the angle of your jaw (about 5 mm long) in the skin which heal with hardly a visible scar in 99% of cases. If you're having a genioplasty (chin operation) with the osteotomy, it is also performed within the mouth, usually as an osteotomy of the chin bone to reduce or enhance the chin.

A single jaw operation takes around 60-90 minutes, and a double jaw operation takes two to three hours. Remember that you will be away from your relatives and they will not see you for six to eight hours from when you go to theatre as it takes time to do safety checks, anaesthetise you, prepare you for surgery, wake you up and move you to recovery where you will spend two to three hours before relatives are called. Please advise relatives of this.

What can I expect after I wake up from the operation?

You will feel drowsy, slightly confused, but not usually in pain, though there will be discomfort. You may feel nauseous but we have medication for this. There may be one or two elastics between your top and bottom jaw to support you. You will have a sore throat from the tube the anaesthetist passed down your nose when they put you to sleep. There will be an accumulation of saliva and some blood in your mouth, but the nurse will be there to help you and suction it out, make you feel comfortable and re-assure you.

In the morning the surgical team will see you. They will review your medical state and will decide whether to discharge you. You will also be seen by a dietician to help with supplements and dietary and fluid advice, but our guidance is to start trying to eat soft foods as soon as possible and to drink plenty of water after you leave the hospital.

You will be going home with medication that we will prescribe for you. You will also be given oral hygiene instructions. You must clean your mouth after every meal or supplementary drink with gentle brushing of your teeth, rinsing with corsodyl mouth wash or warm salty water, which you can prepare at home after every meal. Maintaining your oral hygiene is imperative to your quick recovery.

What can I expect my face to look like immediately after the operation?

This varies from person to person. Depending on the procedure, and your own tissues, you will be swollen to different degrees. Do not be concerned if initially the one side of the face is more swollen than the other. Initially you will have more swelling the day after the procedure. The majority of the swelling gradually settles over the next three to four weeks. In addition to swelling there is often bruising. This migrates downward as far as the chest over time.

As a rough guide, the swelling goes down by about 50% after two weeks, about another 20% after another two weeks and another 10% the last two weeks. Six weeks after your operation you will be 80-90% recovered in terms of swelling and function and the rest settles down over the next two to three months. These are rough figures and every patient recovers at different rates. As a practical example, most people go out shopping after two weeks.

Surprisingly, few people complain of much pain, but rather discomfort, swelling and being unable to eat normally. You will have varied degrees of numbness around your lips and face, depending on the procedure immediately following your operation. You will feel tired from the operation and worn out for the first week.

There will be some mild bleeding in your mouth and throat for the first few days. If your top jaw has been operated on as well, there will be some expected bleeding from the nose. That will take up to two weeks to settle down completely and you will not be able to breathe through your nose for the first few weeks.

Initially expect that you will dribble from your mouth for the first two or so weeks and struggle with eating, although we encourage you to drink fluids and have soft food as soon as possible.

You will need elastics between your top and lower teeth for several weeks.

For the first two weeks you will need to be on blended food and nutritional drink supplements if you are not eating enough. We encourage people to drink as much as possible, and to start on a diet as soon as possible after the operation. You will need to be seen on a weekly basis for the first four to six weeks by your orthodontist and in the joint clinic with your surgeon to ensure everything is going well.

What could the serious complications with jaw/orthognathic surgery be?

Serious complications are unusual but include all the complications of any intermediate to major operation when general anaesthetics are used.

Patients and their families often ask us if any very serious complications can occur with this type of surgery, such as death, life threatening bleeding, life threatening infections, pulmonary emboli, loss of teeth and parts of the operated jaw. The answer is yes, any of the above may happen, but these are unusual events. We give the analogy of driving a car. Every time any one of us gets in a car, we all know, although it is very unlikely, that we could at any point be involved in a life threatening motor vehicle accident. But we all use motor vehicles because we feel the liberating benefit of getting from point A to point B is disproportionate to the risk of something seriously adverse happening in our journey.

To put this in perspective however, from our audited, operated series over the last eight years of hundreds of operated patients, there have been no deaths, no life threatening infections or loss of parts of the jaws and teeth. There have been two patients admitted to intensive care with anaesthetic chest complications who made a complete recovery and two life threatening bleeds which were successfully treated by our surgeons in theatre with no long-term

What are the more common complications related to orthognathic/jaw surgery?

- You will be swollen and there may be bruising as described above.
- You will lose some weight as you will initially struggle with a normal diet, again depending on what you've had done.
- You will have varying degrees of numbness for the first few days, weeks and months around the lips and face. We know that there is a 20-30% risk of some permanent loss of feeling around the gums, lips and chin, varying from a small to a large area, to different degrees of feeling or numbness and sometimes tingling. From our audited data, we have never come across a single person who has complained that they have not, after eight to 10 months, adapted to their numbness without a problem. Almost all our patients adapt to this quite well over a period of months and it usually is not a serious issue in their lives.
- There is no problem with movement of the lips or face, as this nerve is very rarely affected.
- Unusually, numbness to the side of the tongue can occur and is more bothersome than numbness to the lip. Again people adapt reasonably well.

- There is a risk of around 3% that you may need to be put back to sleep a few days after the operation to adjust the position of the jaws, if they are not sitting the way they should, but this is usually a short operation.
- We have found that blood transfusions are rare in single jaw procedures and in double jaw procedures our data indicate around a 3% possibility.
- Around 3% of our patients do get their jaws wired together for four to six weeks if the internal fixation with plates and screws is not effective.
- Pain in the joints of the lower jaw following this surgery is unusual, but possible.
- Although we are striving to change your face and teeth in a good and improved functional cosmetic position, the body has a 'memory', so to speak, of your previous anatomy. This may result in various degrees of what is known as 'relapse', both orthodontically and surgically. In other words, there will always be a tendency for your nerves, muscles, skin, tongue and lips to bring your face and teeth back to their pre-treatment position to some degree. The chances of going back to your pre-treatment position are very slim, but there may be some degree of relapse, not usually to any large extent, but on occasion it may. You can help by following the instructions of the orthodontists to wear different types of retainers on your teeth as instructed. These may be removable or fixed depending on their advice.
- If you are having an operation to your top jaw, there is always a possibility of the shape of the nose changing slightly, depending on the surgical movements, because the nose is closely related to your top jaw. These changes are normally subtle and most people looking at you will not notice them, but you may. Changes to your nose will usually fit well with your face. Very few patients are bothered by these changes, but you need to be aware of them. The most common change is slight broadening of the nose. If you have had problems with breathing through the nose, surgery to the top jaw very often improves the breathing, but this is not of course the primary reason for jaw surgery. It is very rare for breathing to get worse following an operation to your top jaw.
- Transient infections two to three weeks after the operation can occur, are usually managed with antibiotics and they almost always settle down.
- Plates or screws may become infected after months and may need removing. This requires a relatively minor procedure under general anaesthetic. From our data, only 2 to 3% of patients have had such problem.

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What should I do if I have a medical problem after I leave hospital?

Contact us

1. Monday to Friday 9.00 am – 5.00 pm call my office on 0207 042 1810
2. After hours ring any of the hospital switchboards on my website and they will get in touch with me.
3. In an emergency where for whatever reason the hospital you have called cannot get hold of me, contact our Specialist Maxillofacial Team to which I also belong and has 24 hour on-call personnel on 0208 864 3232 at Northwick Park Hospital for advice.
4. If it is urgent and you cannot speak on the phone come directly to the hospital A & E Department at Northwick Park Hospital.

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“ I cannot thank you and your team enough.
You were all caring
kind and supportive
throughout my journey. ”



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