

Oro-antral communication (OAC)

Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery

Information for Patients

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Introduction

The aim of this leaflet help you understand what oro-antral communication is.

It has some answers to the most often asked questions.

If you have any more questions or concerns after reading this leaflet, please ask a member of the surgical team looking after your care.

What is oro-antral communication (OAC)?

Oro-antral communication is an opening formed between the nose, mouth and sinuses. Sinuses are air filled cavities above your top back teeth and side of your nose.

This opening can form when a molar tooth, and less often, when a pre-molar tooth (teeth directly in front of your back teeth) is removed, or when trying to remove a broken root piece. The tips of the roots of back teeth, can normally sit very close to the floor of the sinus. In some patients they can sit just inside the sinus.

It can also form when trying to get a bit of tooth root that may have broken off when a tooth was being taken out. This can mean that liquids move from the mouth into the sinus and out through the nose, when you try to swallow.

Sucking on a straw, playing a wind instrument or smoking may be difficult to do, as you will not be able to form a seal in the mouth.

If left untreated OAC can form an oro-antral fistula (OAF). This is an abnormal passageway or tunnel. It can lead to infection in the sinuses (sinusitis).

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Signs of an OAC

- Tooth extraction site does not heal
- Feeling fluid or food go into your nose when eating or drinking
- Feeling air rush across the extracted tooth area when breathing
- Repeated sinus infections
- Pain and/or tenderness of the area under your eye or upper cheek
- One sided blocked nose or discharge
- One sided, dull, throbbing pain or pressure sensation

Does it need to be repaired?

If small enough, and with time, the opening (OAC) will close naturally. However, if very large you will need an operation to repair or close it. This is more likely to happen in patients who smoke, as smoking can interfere with the body's ability to heal.

How is an OAC repaired?

The most common method used to close an OAC

- is to loosen the gums on either side of where the tooth was taken out, along with some of the skin in the sulcus (where the gum joins the cheek)
- this is pulled over the socket/hole and stitched into its new place. It covers the hole, letting it heal.
- We can do this under local anaesthetic (you are awake).

This is usually effective in 95% of the cases, with only 5% needing the surgery to be re-done if not successful.

If the opening is large or the closure was not successful the first time, we may need to do the repair under general anaesthetic (you are asleep). This is more likely if a fragment/piece of root has floated into the sinus.

- the sinus is washed out (if needed)
- some of the fat from inside the cheek, and skin from the roof of the mouth, is used/moved to close the hole
- this is stitched over the hole or communication. The stiches we use will dissolve over the next 2 to 3 weeks

What are the risks of this surgery?

- Some oozing of blood on and off over the first 24 hours, staining your saliva is to be expected
- Discomfort or pain should be expected, for which you can use over-the-counter pain medication

- You may be prescribed a course of antibiotics
- Dissolving stitches in the area may be a source of infection if not kept clean. They can trap food and bacteria around the wound
- You may feel congested after. We will prescribe a nasal decongestant to help with this. Steam inhalation may also help if congested.
- Some swelling/bruising, is normal, but everyone is different so this can vary. The peak of the swelling will appear on day 3. It will slowly go down after that.

Things to avoid

- Avoid nose blowing or pinching the nostrils whilst sneezing. Both actions can raise pressure in the sinus, and could cause the wound healing to break down.
- Avoid using a straw, as this will do the same thing.
- Avoid blowing-up balloons, air mattresses, wind/brass instruments, scuba diving or flying. This will be the case for 6 weeks.
- Avoid hard or chewy foods like steak, baguettes, crisps etc. These could interfere/affect wound healing.

Smoking, should be avoided for 2 reasons:

1. it will encourage pressure in the sinus, causing the wound to breakdown
2. it can lead to infection in the wound.

Contact details

If you have any more questions or concerns, please contact us on the below telephone numbers:

Maxillofacial department :

0116 258 5301 (Reception)

0116 258 5671 (Nurses station)

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