

MALCOLM CAMERON

MBBS BDS FRCS(OMFS) FRCS(Eng) FDSRCS(Eng) GMC No. 4301619, GDC No. 64977.

Consultant Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeon

Spire Cambridge Lea Hospital
30 New Road
Impington
Cambridge
CB24 9EL

All enquiries & correspondence to
Secretary to Mr Malcolm Cameron
Spire Cambridge Lea Hospital

Tel/Fax: 01223 266928
Email: mmp2sec@btconnect.com

The Nuffield Hospital Cambridge
4 Trumpington Road
Cambridge
CB2 8AF

Appointments: 01223 266990

Appointments: 01223 370922

FRACTURES OF THE LOWER JAW

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of your forthcoming treatment and contains answers to many of the common questions. If you have any other questions that are not answered here please ask.

The problem

Your lower jaw is broken. The number of fractures, where they have are and what treatment they need has already been established. The treatment that is about to take place involves a general anaesthetic, ie: you are going to be put to sleep completely.

What does the operation involve?

Once you are asleep the relevant fracture sites will be opened up via a cut on the inside of your mouth. The broken bones are then returned to their normal position and held in place with metal plates and screws. The gum is stitched back into place with dissolvable stitches that can take a fortnight or sometimes longer to fall out.

During the operation it is sometimes necessary to place metal braces around your teeth (held in position with wires) so that elastic bands can be attached to them and guide your bite into the correct position after surgery. Screws inserted into the jawbone above and below the teeth are also used instead of metal braces. If guiding elastics are used, they are usually placed the day following surgery, ie: you will be able to move your jaw when you wake up following the operation.

Will anything else be done while I am asleep?

Occasionally it is necessary to remove damaged (or decayed) teeth at the time of surgery. In difficult fractures it is sometimes necessary to make a cut on the outside of the mouth through the skin of the face. Such incisions are carefully planned to be as inconspicuous as possible. If this is going to take place, the site and approximate size of the cut will be discussed with you before the operation as well as any other risks and potential complications.

What can I expect after the operation?

Having a broken jaw can be painful and even after it's been fixed it's likely to be uncomfortable so regular painkillers are usually necessary. The discomfort is usually worse for the first few days and the situation steadily improves over a week or so.

To reduce the risk of infection, antibiotics are normally given intravenously (through a vein) whilst you are in hospital. In some cases it may be necessary for you to have more antibiotics by mouth once at home. You may need to stay in the hospital for one night following the surgery. After the operation the position of the fracture(s) may be checked with x-rays prior to going home.

Although the plates and screws hold the fractures in place it still takes around six weeks for your lower jaw to heal to a point where a normal diet can be taken. During this time you need to eat a soft diet. It is important to keep your mouth as clean as possible for the first few weeks after surgery. It is often tricky to clean your teeth around stitches so using a soft toothbrush may help. It is best to keep the area free from food debris by gently rinsing your mouth with a mouthwash and / or warm salt water (dissolve a flat teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water) commencing on the day after surgery.

If any wires, metal braces or screws are used to help guide your bite into the correct position they will be removed in the outpatient department once they are no longer needed.

Do I need to take any time off work?

Depending on the nature of your work it may be necessary to take some time off work and avoid strenuous exercise for a while. It is important to remember that you should not drive or operate machinery for 48 hours after your general anaesthetic.

What are the possible problems?

- Infection can occur following any type of surgery.
- Bleeding from the cuts inside your mouth is unlikely to be a problem but should the area bleed when you get home this can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the site for at least 10 minutes with a swab or clean rolled up handkerchief.
- There is a nerve that runs through the lower jaw that supplies feeling to your lower lip, chin and bottom teeth. This nerve may have been injured at the time of the fracture and as a result you might already feel some tingling or numbness in your lip and / or chin. This tingling may also be caused or made worse by surgery. In the majority of people this altered sensation gets better on its own although it can take several months to do so.
- Occasionally, the teeth of the jaw may be damaged by screws that are used to fix it.
- If plates or screws have been put in your jaw, these are not normally removed unless they become infected. Leaving clean plates in place rarely causes problems except in young children when they tend to be removed so that growth is not impaired. The metal that is used is titanium which does not set off metal detectors in airports etc.
- Ask if other risks are likely in your case.

Will I need further appointments?

A review appointment will be arranged when you leave hospital. It is usual to keep a close eye on you for several weeks following treatment to make sure that your jaw heals uneventfully.