



All About the Dreadful Dry Socket

Without proper care of a tooth extraction site, one can end up in a world of hurt.

What is Dry Socket?

After a tooth is extracted, part of the healing process includes the development of a blood clot over the extraction site, or socket. This blood clot is supposed to serve as protection for the nerves and bone exposed after the tooth was removed and help promote the growth of new bone and soft tissue at the extraction site.

When this blood clot doesn't form properly, or does, but becomes dislodged or dissolves prematurely, this is a dry socket. Without the protection of the blood clot, bacteria can also enter the socket, reaching the exposed bone and nerves. In the worst cases, this could result in an infection at the extraction site, including infection in the bone.

What Causes Dry Socket?

Though the exact cause of dry socket has not been determined, there is suspicion that trauma to the extraction site or bacterial contamination of the socket could be factors.

It has also been determined that certain patients could be more likely to develop dry socket if they:

- Smoke or use tobacco
- Take oral contraceptives
 - The high level of estrogen could hinder the normal healing process
- Have an existing infection in their mouth
- Don't follow after-care instructions
- Have a history of dry socket from previous extractions

What Do I Do If I Think I Have Dry Socket?

The first thing that a patient should do when they suspect they have dry socket is contact their dentist. The dentist will be able to examine the area to determine if the patient does have dry socket and take steps to treat the issue if necessary. The dentist may take an x-ray to rule out other causes of pain, like remaining tooth fragments from the extraction or bone infection.



Do I Have Dry Socket?

After an extraction, it is normal for patients to experience some pain but this pain should reduce over a few days.

If, instead, the patient experiences any of the following symptoms, they may have dry socket:

- An obvious lack of blood clot where the tooth was pulled
- Visible bone at the extraction site
- Increased/severe pain after a few days, possibly radiating to the neck, temple, eye, or ear on same side of the face as the extraction
- Bad breath, odor, or taste in the mouth

How is Dry Socket Treated?

In many cases, the pain caused from dry socket cannot be relieved by over-the-counter medications alone and requires professional intervention for relief.

The dentist may flush out any debris from the socket and pack the open socket with a medicated dressing to prevent any further contamination, which should reduce the patient's level of pain. In this case, the dentist will also provide home care instructions so the patient can clean and dress the extraction site at home.

How Can I Prevent Dry Socket?

Even though the exact cause of dry socket is unknown, the best way to prevent it is to follow the after-care directions provided by the dentist as closely as possible.



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