

Tooth Abscess

Dental Abscess

A dental abscess is an infection of the tooth socket. It often starts with a crack or cavity in the tooth. A pocket of pus forms between the tooth and the bone. The infection causes pain and swelling of the gum, cheek or jaw. The pain is often made worse by drinking hot or cold fluids, or biting on hard foods. Pain may be felt in the facial sinus or in the ear. A severe infection can interfere with swallowing and breathing.

In the emergency department or clinic, you will be started on an antibiotic. However, final treatment requires drainage of the pus. This can be done by removing the tooth or performing a root canal. A root canal is done by an oral surgeon and involves drilling an opening in the tooth to drain the pus. After the infection has healed, a crown is placed over the tooth.

Home care

The following guidelines will help you care for your abscess at home:

1. Avoid hot and cold foods and liquids since your tooth may be sensitive to temperature changes.
2. If your tooth is chipped or cracked, or if there is a large open cavity, apply **oil of cloves** (available over-the-counter in drug stores) directly to the tooth to reduce pain. Some pharmacies carry an over-the-counter "toothache kit". This contains oil of cloves and a paste, which can be applied over the exposed tooth to decrease sensitivity.
3. Apply an ice pack (ice cubes in a plastic bag, wrapped in a towel) over the injured area for 20 minutes every 1–2 hours the first day for pain relief. Continue this 3–4 times a day until the pain and swelling goes away.
4. You may use acetaminophen or ibuprofen to control pain, unless another medicine was prescribed. If you have chronic liver or kidney disease or ever had a stomach ulcer or GI bleeding, talk with your doctor before using these medicines.
5. An antibiotic will be prescribed. Take it as directed until completed, even if you are feeling better sooner.

Follow-up care

Follow up as directed with a dentist or oral surgeon. Even though your pain may improve with the treatment given today, only a dentist or oral surgeon can provide full treatment for this problem.

When to seek medical care

Get prompt medical attention or contact your doctor if any of the following occur:

- Your face or eyelid becomes swollen or red
- Pain worsens or spreads to the neck
- Fever over 100.4°F (38.0°C)

Unusual drowsiness; headache or stiff neck; weakness, or fainting

Pus drains from the gum or tooth

Difficulty talking, swallowing or breathing

Unable to open your mouth wide