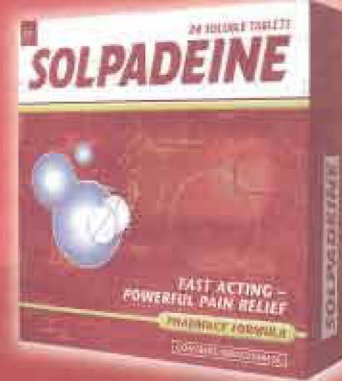


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# Dental Pain and Tooth Extractions

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**Every year nearly half the population will experience some form of dental pain or discomfort and 25% will eventually be driven to seek dental treatment as a result.**

## Dental pain and toothache

There are various levels of toothache ranging from occasional discomfort caused by early tooth decay, or periodontal (gum) disease, to the more severe, constant pain caused by advanced tooth decay and dental abscesses. In this latter case you may not be able to bite your teeth together properly and eating may be difficult or even impossible.

Dental pain may occur following dental treatment. For example it is not uncommon after a large, deep filling has been placed, a dental extraction or root treatment. The degree of the pain is related to the amount of damaged dental tissues e.g. the surgical removal of an impacted wisdom tooth can lead to several days of discomfort. Your dentist will advise you on the best medication to take and a special routine to follow that will minimise this discomfort and speed up the healing process. It is most unusual for post-operative pain to last for more than 5-7 days and in the vast majority of cases medication will not be required for more than 3 days or so.

There are other causes of dental pain that resemble toothache in people who otherwise may have good oral hygiene and excellent teeth. For example sinusitis can cause pain to the upper teeth that can feel just like toothache. Other, deep-seated aches in the jaws may also indicate the presence of diseases such as an abscess or a cyst. In these cases diagnosis may not be easy but it is very important to see a dentist who may have to refer you to a consultant for further tests. It is possible to avoid most causes of dental pain by regularly visiting your dentist for routine examinations.

## Tooth extractions

At some stage of their lives, most people will need to have one or more of their teeth removed. This can be for a number of different reasons and can be done under local or general anaesthetic.

*Local anaesthetic* is when an injection is given in the gum, close to the tooth to be removed, to completely numb the area. The patient is awake during the procedure and although they may feel a little pressure during the extraction, they will feel no pain.

*General anaesthetic* is when the patient is 'put to sleep' temporarily whilst the tooth extraction is carried out and so will be unconscious during the procedure. This method is usually only used if the extraction is likely to be particularly complicated, if the patient is very nervous or has special needs. Most general anaesthetics are performed in hospital.

## Why would I need to have a tooth removed?

There are four main reasons for removing teeth:

- *Impacted* – this means that the tooth has been prevented from growing into the correct position, by bone or other teeth. This is the most common reason for wisdom teeth extractions.
- *Orthodontic treatment* – sometimes teeth will have to be removed to make room in an overcrowded mouth to allow the remaining teeth to come through straight.
- *Severe decay or damage* – sometimes teeth may have to be removed because they are so badly damaged or decayed that extraction is the only option.
- *Gum disease* – gum disease can progress so far that the teeth become loose and have to be extracted.

## After the extraction

Once your tooth has been removed it is important to allow time for a blood clot to form in the hole (tooth socket) where the tooth was, to begin the healing process. It is therefore

