

Having a [tooth](#) pulled in adulthood is sometimes necessary.

Reasons for Pulling Teeth

Although permanent teeth were meant to last a lifetime, there are a number of reasons why [tooth extraction](#) may be needed. A very common reason involves a [tooth](#) that is too badly damaged, from trauma or decay, to be repaired. Other reasons include:

A crowded [mouth](#). Sometimes dentists pull teeth to prepare the [mouth](#) for orthodontia. The goal of orthodontia is to properly align the teeth, which may not be possible if your teeth are too big for your [mouth](#). Likewise, if a tooth cannot break through the gum (erupt) because there is not room in the mouth for it, your dentist may recommend pulling it.

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Infection. If [tooth decay](#) or damage extends to the pulp -- the center of the tooth containing nerves and [blood](#) vessels -- bacteria in the mouth can enter the pulp, leading to infection. Often this can be corrected with [root canal](#) therapy (RCT), but if the infection is so severe that [antibiotics](#) or RCT do not cure it, extraction may be needed to prevent the spread of infection.

Risk of infection. If your immune system is compromised (for example, if you are receiving [chemotherapy](#) or are having an [organ transplant](#)), even the risk of infection in a particular tooth may be reason enough to pull the tooth.

Periodontal (Gum) Disease. If [periodontal disease](#) -- an infection of the tissues and bones that surround and support the teeth -- have caused loosening of the teeth, it may be necessary to pull the tooth or teeth.

What to Expect With Tooth Extraction

Dentists and oral surgeons (dentists with special training to perform surgery) perform tooth extractions. Before pulling the tooth, your dentist will give you an injection of a local anesthetic to numb the area where the tooth will be removed. In some instances, your dentist may use a strong general anesthetic. This will prevent pain throughout your body and make you [sleep](#) through the procedure.

If the tooth is impacted, the dentist will cut away gum and bone tissue that cover the tooth and then, using forceps, grasp the tooth and gently rock it back and forth to loosen it from the jaw bone and ligaments that hold it in place. Sometimes, a hard-to-pull tooth must be removed in pieces.

Once the tooth has been pulled, a [blood clot](#) usually forms in the socket. The dentist will pack a gauze pad into the socket and have you bite down on it to help stop the bleeding. Sometimes the dentist will place a few [stitches](#) -- usually self-dissolving -- to close the gum edges over the extraction site.

Sometimes, the blood clot in the socket breaks loose, exposing the bone in the socket. This is a painful condition called [dry socket](#). If this happens, your dentist will likely place a sedative dressing over the socket for a few days to protect it as a new clot forms.

What to Tell Your Dentist Before You Have a Tooth Pulled

Although having a tooth pulled is usually very safe, the procedure can allow harmful bacteria into the bloodstream. Gum tissue is also at risk of infection. If you have a condition that puts you at high risk for developing a severe infection, you may need to take [antibiotics](#) before and after the extraction. Before having a tooth pulled, let your dentist know your complete medical history, the [medications](#) and [supplements](#) you take, and if you have one of the following:

- Damaged or man-made [heart](#) valves
- Congenital [heart](#) defect
- Impaired immune system
- [Liver](#) disease ([cirrhosis](#))
- Artificial joint, such as a [hip replacement](#)
- History of bacterial endocarditis

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After You've Had a Tooth Pulled

Following an extraction, your dentist will send you home to recover. Recovery typically takes a few days. The following can help minimize discomfort, reduce the risk of infection, and speed recovery.

- Take painkillers as prescribed.
- Bite firmly but gently on the gauze pad placed by your dentist to reduce bleeding and allow a clot to form in the tooth socket. Change gauze pads before they become soaked with [blood](#). Otherwise, leave the pad in place for three to four hours after the extraction.
- Apply an ice bag to the affected area immediately after the procedure to keep down swelling. Apply ice for 10 minutes at a time.
- Relax for at least 24 hours after the extraction. Limit activity for the next day or two.
- Avoid rinsing or spitting forcefully for 24 hours after the extraction to avoid dislodging the clot that forms in the socket.
- After 24 hours, rinse with your mouth with a solution made of 1/2 teaspoon salt and 8 ounces of warm water.
- Do not drink from a straw for the first 24 hours.
- Do not smoke, which can inhibit healing.
- Eat soft foods, such as [soup](#), pudding, yogurt, or applesauce the day after the extraction. Gradually add solid foods to your diet as the extraction site heals.
- When lying down, prop your head with pillows. Lying flat may prolong bleeding.
- Continue to brush and floss your teeth, and brush your [tongue](#), but be sure to avoid the extraction site. Doing so will help prevent infection.

When to Call the Dentist

It is normal to feel some pain after the anesthesia wears off. For 24 hours after having a tooth pulled, you should also expect some swelling and residual bleeding. However, if either bleeding or pain is still severe more than four hours after your tooth is pulled, you should call your dentist. You should also call your dentist if you experience any of the following:

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- Signs of infection, including [fever and chills](#)
- Nausea or [vomiting](#)
- Redness, swelling, or excessive discharge from the affected area
- [Cough](#), shortness of breath, [chest pain](#), or severe nausea or [vomiting](#)

The initial healing period usually takes about one to two weeks. New bone and gum tissue will grow into the gap. Over time, however, having a tooth (or teeth) missing can cause the remaining teeth to shift, affecting your bite and making it difficult to chew. For that reason, your dentist may advise replacing the missing tooth or teeth with an implant, fixed bridge, or denture.

<https://www.webmd.com/oral-health/guide/pulling-a-tooth-tooth-extraction#3>