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Orthognathic Surgery FAQs: **From a Patient's Perspective**

Before Orthognathic Surgery:

1.How much time do I need off work?

-Roughly follow the same timeline your surgeon gave you for your recovery, this means about four-six weeks. This is because you need time to rest and let your face heal. You may be swollen, numb, sore, bruised and have your jaw shut with elastics, so this timeline allows you enough time to heal and feel comfortable with yourself by the time you are ready to go back to work.

2.What do I need at home for recovery?

-Ice packs (mobile, rounded/wrap ice packs work best for the face), heating pads, prescriptions given to you by your surgeon, pre-planned liquid/soft food diet (meal replacement drinks, smoothie contents, soups, etc), comfortable clothing, relaxing activities (books, crossword puzzles, shows/movies to watch, card games, etc), syringes (use these to get liquid diet through your elastics), baby toothbrush and baby spoons (these help you eat and brush your teeth with a limited range of mouth opening), tongue scraper (your mouth will feel gross, this helps alleviate some sour taste).

3.Do I need a family member to help me? For how long?

-Yes. You will need a family member with you for at least the first week after surgery. This is because you will not be able to get up / move around much for the first couple of days, as well, you will be on heavy pain medication that will make you impaired. The family member can assist in making / bringing your meals and ice packs, and can keep track of your medications and prescriptions to help manage your pain. Emotional support is also something family members can provide. You will also need a secure ride

to and from the hospital as afterwards is when you need 24 hour care and will require a ride home as you will be impaired from the pain medication / anesthesia.

4. Where does surgery take place?

-The actual surgery will take place at the hospital. The pre-surgical workups will take place at our office (Kelowna Oral and Facial Surgery-KOFS). These pre-surgical appointments will include a consultation with the surgeon, scanning and imaging, measuring, health history with one of our nurses and payment. Before surgery, you will be working with your orthodontist who will inform our office when you are roughly six months away from being ready for surgery. A few days before surgery, you will have blood work done to make sure there are no urgent changes or updates to your health. This will be done at a lab, usually the one across the street from the hospital.

5. How do I know I need Orthognathic surgery?

-Usually orthognathic surgery is suggested by your orthodontist or general dentist if they see fit. Common reasons why one might need orthognathic surgery include functional issues such as problems chewing, problems breathing, misaligned bites (overbite or underbite, discomfort, etc. Aesthetic issues can be covered with orthognathic surgery, but it is NOT the main reason why one would request this type of surgery. Before seeing the oral surgeon, there will be a discussion with your dentist or orthodontist whether this is the right direction for your case.

6. In terms of orthodontic treatment, can I do braces or Invisalign?

-This will be a conversation to have with your orthodontist first. However, in most cases, you can choose either braces or invisalign-whichever you prefer. Braces will have the elastics directly on them and the invisalign will require "buttons" to be put on for the elastics to stay on (they look like the brackets). Invisalign will require you to wear trays after surgery, and require scans afterwards to continue your orthodontic treatment. For this reason, braces are usually a more preferred choice. However, invisalign will allow you to take the trays out when eating and brushing your teeth, and may feel like a more hygiene friendly choice. Both have their pros and cons.

7. Will I lose weight?

-When required to be on a liquid/soft food diet for four-six weeks, there is a likely chance that you will lose some weight. However, by maintaining the caloric intake your body needs by using meal replacement drinks, smoothies, protein powder/protein drinks, etc., you will be able to stay a healthy weight and not lose an unhealthy amount.

8. Is my jaw going to be wired shut?

-No, your jaw will not be wired shut. Nowadays, elastics are used to keep the mouth in the proper occlusion while you heal. Elastics allow you to take them off in an emergency (such as vomiting, choking), and take them off while eating (after your surgeon says you can start wearing them less often). The elastics can also increase or decrease strength, so when you can start wearing them less, the elastics will be switched by your surgeon or orthodontist to work with your progress.

10. What is the likelihood of numbness?

-Very likely. As this surgery requires bones to be broken, and nerves will be stretched in the process, it is likely that your face will feel numb for four-six weeks. There is a very small chance the numbness won't subside, this occurrence is very rare. This will be described in your orthognathic consent form given to you at our office.

11. Why do I have to be on a liquid/soft food diet for four-six weeks after surgery?

-You are required to have a liquid/soft food diet because your jaw must stay in the occlusion set in surgery for at least two-four weeks. Chewing and other activities with major jaw motion will cause the jaw to not heal properly, move the position of the bolts placed, cause excruciating pain, and more. It is one of the most important steps to healing properly, so it is very important to maintain this diet for the timeline instructed to you by your surgeon.

12. Will there be a scar?

-Orthognathic surgery is done primarily through the mouth. That being said, there are occasions where cuts are made on the outer parts of the jaw (depending on the case). The scars will be minimal and will be discussed with your surgeon. For those whose surgeries are through the mouth, you will not have any outer visible scarring, but may have some scars in the mouth that are not visible. For example, one cut made for upper jaw surgery occurs above the front teeth under the lip, so this scar will never be visible unless the lip is manually lifted high enough.

Recovery from Orthognathic Surgery:

1.How long should I use ice packs? Can I use a heating pad?

-You should use an ice pack ten minutes off-ten minutes on immediately after surgery. This should continue for the first few days. Go to sleep with ice packs on, and have some ready in the freezer to switch throughout the night. After 48-72 hours, ice is no longer effective for controlling swelling. Using a heating pad 20 min on/off will help reduce swelling. Following the prescription medications given to you by your surgeon will help maintain pain control and assist with reducing swelling.

2.What can I eat while recovering from my surgery?

- Smoothies, soups, protein drinks, yogurt, yogurt drinks, apple sauce, oatmeal, cream of wheat, blended cottage cheese, etc.
- Avoid using a straw for the first 2 weeks after surgery. You may use a syringe if needed, but typically drinking from a cup, or eating with a spoon will work just fine.
- High protein meals, anything that can be blended to be smooth/liquid can work. Remember that the first few weeks will be challenging to keep your mouth clean, so liquids with limited small bits are recommended so nothing gets stuck/caught in teeth or surgical sights. After four weeks, you may introduce soft food into the diet. This can look like cottage cheese, overcooked pasta, chunky mashed potatoes, overcooked steamed vegetables, etc. By six weeks, the goal is to be able to chew most foods without much issue. It is important to stay hydrated as well. Drinking lots of water, gatorade, and even pedialyte will help you stay hydrated.

3.When can I go back to playing sports?

-After six weeks, the goal is to be back to your normal daily activities. However, this is up to your discretion and if you feel more comfortable waiting longer than six weeks, that is up to you. This can include going back to playing your sports. As always, have caution with contact sports that may cause pain or discomfort if hit in the surgical area. However, non-contact sports such as running, swimming, etc., can be done four-six weeks after surgery if you feel comfortable.

4.Is it ok if I sleep on my side?

-Sleeping on your side is highly discouraged. This is because sleeping on your side can put pressure on your surgical sites, cause asymmetry and cause movement in your jaw. Your bones are in different positions, they need time to restabilize. Try to make yourself comfortable on your back. Use a wedge pillow or stacked pillows and blankets to achieve comfort. Sleeping facing upright between a 45-90 degree angle will be the most desired position for a balanced recovery. This will also allow breathing to be controlled

(not compressed) and allow ice packs to be placed throughout the night. After 2 weeks you can return to a normal sleeping position.

5.How long will my face be swollen?

-Your face will be swollen no matter what. However, the severity of swelling depends on the actual surgery (double jaw, single jaw, with wisdom teeth, etc.,) and how your body reacts. Some patients are swollen for a few weeks, others for a few months. Use ice and heat as instructed above to assist with swelling.

6.Is it normal to feel anxious and/or depressed during my recovery?

-It is very normal to feel anxious and/or depressed. This is because your body is going through a major change. Your face and facial structure will look different, you cannot eat what you want, you may feel “trapped” with the elastics, you may feel insecure about the swelling, and more. The most important part of going through these mental and physical challenges is staying positive. You will not look swollen forever, you will not have elastics forever, you will not be restricted with your diet forever. All these challenges are temporary and will fade eventually. It is important to remember that after a few weeks/months you will feel more comfortable with your pain, your looks, your smile. Remember that this surgery is for the overall benefit of your jaw function, wellbeing, and comfort of your everyday life.

7.Is it normal to have bruising?

-Bruising is a very normal and healthy way to track your body's healing progress. Bruising will usually appear around the locations of the surgical bolts or cuts made through the jaw as this is where the highest level of impact occurred. Bruising should subside within the four-six week healing period.

8.If my joints creak or click, is that ok?

-Yes. Your jaw was dislocated and your joints stretched for a long period of time during your surgery. Just like a pulled muscle from sports, it will take time and patience for this to heal. Remember that your face was in incredibly unnatural positions during surgery, so understand that it will take time to heal. Heating pads assist the soreness and/or creaking of the joints.

9.How do I brush my teeth with elastics on?

-The first two weeks you must keep your elastics on 24 hours a day. You must try to brush the outsides of your teeth as much as you can. This is where the baby toothbrush comes in handy. You will brush with the elastics on, you will not be able to move your lips and mouth much anyways, so using the baby toothbrush allows for brushing movements in and around the elastics. You will not be able to brush the inner side of

your teeth, this is normal but will feel odd. Once your mouth can open wide enough, you may try to brush the inner sides of your teeth. A tongue scraper will assist getting that gross taste out of your mouth. Using the mouthrinse prescribed will also help maintain a clean mouth. Remember, **a clean mouth heals faster.**

10.What if my elastics break?

-It is normal for your elastics to break if you have not changed them out for a while, especially if you are working on your jaw rehabilitation exercises. You should have been given a bag with elastics from your surgeon that you may use to change your elastics daily and/or if they break. The surgeon may have also given you a hemostat (Scissor looking forcep/pliers) that will help grip the elastic and place them on the brackets farther back in the mouth. These are great, use them as much and for as long as you need.

11.How long do I stay in the hospital?

-Depending on your surgery, you will stay for a few hours after surgery or up to a one-to-two night stay after. This is depending on the level of surgery you had, the amount of time you were under general anesthesia, and how long you need to be monitored afterwards. If you are under 17 years of age, a family member will be able to stay the night with you while you recover at the hospital. If you are over 17 years of age, you will be welcome to have visitors, but unfortunately there will not be an extra bed for an overnight stay. Your surgeon will come to the hospital later that day, or the next morning to check in and see how you are doing. Two, four and six weeks after surgery, you will come to the office for postoperative follow-up appointments.

12.How long does it take to talk normally after jaw surgery?

-The first few weeks may feel strange and difficult to speak. Initially, your throat will be sore as you were intubated with a breathing tube that irritates your throat, this is normal. As your facial muscles will feel numb and stiff, you may find it hard to speak as your voice works, yet your face cannot move to allow you to speak clearly. You may drool as well as you cannot make the movements to stop the drool from occurring, this is normal. As well being shut with elastics creates an even further challenge to form words. Overall, it may take a week or so to feel like you can form proper words. Being shut with elastics for four weeks creates challenges with speaking, so keep in mind it may be after this time that you feel more free to speak more comfortably.

After Orthognathic Surgery:

1.How often and why do I need to do my rehabilitating exercises?

-Setting a schedule to encourage yourself to keep up with your exercises is important. Listen to your surgeon's instructions and follow them strictly. They are providing these instructions so you can get back to moving and chewing as quickly as possible. This is similar to physical therapy, and therefore will be tough, painful and scary at times. Just remember these exercises are meant to strengthen your jaw while you heal, they will benefit you greatly in the long run.

2.How do you start to learn how to recognize yourself with a new facial structure?

-A common hesitation to having orthognathic surgery is the fear of looking different afterwards. The benefit of orthognathic surgery is that the changes occurring are simply to improve your previous functional and aesthetic problems. Although you may look different, it is important to remember that this is how your face should look when the functionality and aesthetics side of things are how they're supposed to be. That being said, it is completely normal to feel anxious or nervous about getting to learn your new look. Most of the time, the changes are so subtle that only close family members may be able to tell a difference. As well, strangers would never know that something has changed. Swelling and bruising afterwards may confuse you on how you will look eventually, and unfortunately you have to be patient to see the final results until you have fully healed. Like any big change, it is important to remember it will take time to get used to, and that this change occurred for the better of your wellbeing and functionality.

3.How long will it take to feel like I can chew normally again?

-You are able to chew normally after six weeks. However, depending on your surgery, it may feel more like two-three months post-operation before you feel like you can take a strong bite into something like a cheeseburger. This is completely normal and may take longer depending on how you heal, if you are doing your rehabilitation exercises, if you had double or single jaw surgery, etc. What will help is continuing to practice chewing on different types of foods (work your way up to chewier foods) and doing your rehabilitation exercises as instructed. One day, you will be able to eat a piece of pizza and not even think about chewing. That is when you will know all the work you have put in to get to that moment has paid off.

4.How long do I wear my braces / invisalign buttons after my surgery?

-This will be up to your orthodontist, but can vary from months up to a year. It varies case to case. You will continue wearing your braces/invisalign for a specific amount of time afterwards as this allows your orthodontist to perfect your smile and bite, and to perfect the functionality of your jaw and teeth. Do not rush this process, it will be worth it

in the end. As well, after braces/invisalign you will get “after” photos taken to show your transformation, this is incredible to see!! Continue wearing your retainer at night (and/or follow the orthodontist's instructions) after you are done braces/invisalign to make sure you retain all the work you, your surgeon and your orthodontist have put into your smile.

5.How long will it take to gain the weight back that I lost during the soft food diet?

-If you followed the four-six week soft food/liquid diet, you may have lost a little bit of weight. Hopefully not a drastic amount as you still should be able to reach a healthy caloric intake, just liquid form. The weight loss comes from the lack of solid foods. Once you are able to introduce solid foods again, the weight should come back rather quickly. It is important not to indulge in solid foods right away and slowly reintroduce them into your diet. This is to allow your digestive system time to digest this food again and not overload the calories / different levels of nutrients as it has not had to do that for a few weeks. Once again, be mindful and patient with this step of recovering.

6.Is it worth it?

-This surgery was recommended as you were suffering functional issues with your jaw. Although it is an elective surgery, it is something that is required to restore function and comfort to your daily life. That being said, the recovery is tough, but it is really worth it as your wellbeing, your functionality and even your aesthetic (if that is a concern) will improve. If you are concerned, go to YouTube and search up “jaw surgery vlogs.” Watching other peoples’ experiences before/during/after can provide tips, tricks, ease of mind, and ideas as to what the experience may look like. Remember every experience is different, but this is a way to see what others thought about theirs.

7.What is the most common cause of relapse following orthognathic surgery?

-Not wearing the elastics as instructed by your surgeon, chewing before instructed, not being careful (starting contact sports too soon, falling, etc.) and not completing the paired orthodontic treatment. Not participating in the proper steps to allow yourself to heal will cause your surgical outcomes to fail.

Video Experience/Ideas:

-Use the QR code below to follow along with a staff member at KOFs who had double jaw surgery performed by Dr. Martyna to get an idea of what the experience may be like:

