



Dry Sockets

What is a dry socket?

A “dry socket” occurs when the blood clot is lost from an extraction site prematurely. The blood clot in the socket serves the same two functions as a “scab” on a skin surface cut. First, it assists in the cessation of bleeding and second, it protects underlying structures during the healing process. Just like if someone “picks at a scab”, the area heals in time, but is painful for far longer than if the “scab” had been left alone.

There are some activities which may increase the likelihood for dry socket formation...smoking, drinking carbonated beverages, spitting, or drinking through a straw in the first 72 hours after surgery...but often dry sockets occur for no particular reason at all.

When the blood clot is lost before the underlying structures have had time to heal, bone is exposed to the oral environment along with fine nerve endings. This is very painful but otherwise is a relatively harmless situation. The goal in treating a dry socket is to manage the pain until the area heals itself. This may be done with pain medication or a medicated dressing which may be placed in the area to help ease the discomfort. Most patients require only one or two additional visits if dry socket treatment is necessary. Overall, time and good oral hygiene usually resolve the situation.

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