

## Tooth Abscess

One of the most common reasons people visit their dentist is due to a tooth abscess. If untreated they can cause damage to your teeth and health. It is important to see your dentist as soon as possible to treat the bacterial infection and to reduce potential spread to the surrounding jaw bone, teeth and tissue.

### What is a tooth abscess?

A tooth abscess is a build up of pus around a tooth. If left untreated it can damage the involved tooth, spread to the adjacent teeth and decay the neighbouring jaw bone. If the tooth is located near the maxillary sinus, an opening can potentially develop between the tooth abscess and the sinus.

### What are the symptoms of a tooth abscess?

The symptoms of a tooth abscess can include:

- Pus
- Redness and swelling of the face or gums
- [Severe toothache](#)
- Pain that radiates to your neck, jaw or ear
- Pain when biting or chewing
- Loose or discoloured tooth
- Fever
- A bad taste in your mouth or bad breath
- Sensitivity of the teeth to hot or cold
- Swollen glands in the neck
- Swollen upper or lower jaw (could indicate severe infection)
- Difficulty swallowing or opening mouth
- Nausea, vomiting

### What causes a tooth abscess?

A tooth abscess may be caused by:

- Tooth decay
- Dental injury
- Severe gum disease

### What are the types of abscess?

There are three types of tooth abscesses that can form in different areas near the tooth and for different reasons. They include:

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- **Periapical abscess** – This is the most common type of abscess. It occurs at the end of the tooth’s root and is as a result of an untreated cavity or dental injury.
- **Periodontal abscess** – This abscess affects the gum tissue that surrounds the teeth. It is usually caused by plaque build-up and is common in people with pre-existing periodontal disease or those who are immunocompromised (eg. those with poorly controlled diabetes).
- **Gingival abscess** – Is caused by a bacterial infection from food stuck in the gum line, a broken tooth or tooth decay. They are the least common type of abscess.

### What are the treatment options for a dental abscess?

There are several treatment options available depending on the type of abscess and treatment options available.

Treatment of a localised **periapical abscess** is to drain the pus (the first stage of a root canal called a pulp extirpation) which will address the source of infection. Antibiotic treatment is generally not required because the dental treatment will remove the source of infection and the abscess should resolve rapidly.

Management of **periodontal abscess** includes:

- Draining the abscess (with local anaesthetics)
- Removing plaque thorough debridement
- Irrigating the area with water, saline solution or local anaesthetic solution
- In severe cases, tooth extraction may be necessary to drain pus adequately

Referral to a specialist may be required if a periodontal abscess does not respond to local treatment.

A **gingival abscess** is treated in the same way as a **periapical abscess** by cleaning the area and removing what is causing the infection.

### How to prevent a dental abscess?

It is important to take good care of your teeth to avoid tooth decay which is essential to preventing a tooth abscess. Steps to take good care of your teeth include:

- Brush your teeth for two minutes per day at least twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss daily
- Replace your toothbrush every 3-4 months or when ends are frayed.
- Eat healthy food and limit sugary foods.
- Visit your dentist regularly
- Consider using an antiseptic or fluoride mouth rinse to add an extra layer of protection against tooth decay.
- Drink more water
- Not smoking

### What increases your chances of having a dental abscess?

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There are certain factors that increase your risk of a dental abscess:

- Poor dental hygiene
- A diet high in sugar
- Dry mouth

**When is a dental abscess considered an emergency?**

Always see your dentist promptly if you have any signs or symptoms of a tooth abscess.

If you have fever and swelling of your face and can't get to your dentist go to the emergency room. If you have any trouble breathing or swallowing this may indicate that the infection has spread to your jaw, throat, neck or to other areas of your body and you should also go to an emergency room immediately.

**Sources**

[www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)

[www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)

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