

Getting to the root of TOOTH REMOVAL

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A TROUBLESOME TOOTH NEEDS EXTRACTING?
HERE ARE THE INS AND OUTS OF REMOVING TEETH.

Words Karen Burge

While most dental trouble is simple to resolve, with minor maintenance and a renewed commitment to your brush-and-floss regimen after you leave the dentist, some problems can require the extraction (removal) of a tooth.

Australian Dental Association federal executive and dentist Dr Stephen Liew says if a tooth extraction is recommended by your dentist, there must be a solid reason. "In modern dentistry, non-invasive treatment is considered your highest priority. We save teeth at all costs."

THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

There are several reasons why a tooth might need to come out, including tooth fracture; gum disease or decay; wisdom teeth concerns; infections; orthodontic (alignment) issues; or to resolve the problem of having extra teeth in the mouth.

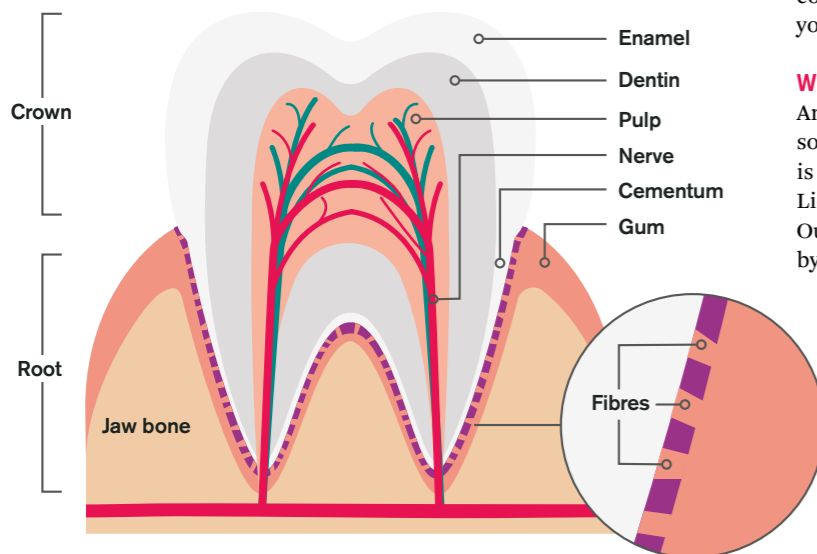
A good dentist will weigh up the potential results and cost-effectiveness of a procedure, says Dr Liew. For example, while they can try to save a tooth with complex root canal treatment, crown work and gum surgery, if the prognosis for that tooth is poor, it may not be worth all that work and expense, he explains. Instead you could have an extraction and an implant to give back your bite.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN A TOOTH EXTRACTION?

An extraction permanently removes a tooth from its socket in the jawbone. "A nice way to think about teeth is that they're held into the jaw by a basket of fibres," Dr Liew says. "They're not actually lodged in your bone. Our job is to loosen the fibre attachment, and we do that by gently pushing around the root of the tooth.

"Once you've loosened the fibres, then according to the anatomy of the tooth, you can move the tooth back and forth or in circles and just gently tease it out of the socket – up and out. That's the simplest form of extraction."

Straightforward extractions can be done by your regular dentist, while complicated cases will require a referral to a specialist dentist for surgical extraction, says Dr Liew. The procedure will be done either in



the dentist's chair with possible sedation, or under general anaesthetic in a day surgery or hospital.

Tooth roots vary in shape from something similar to an ice-cream cone, which is very simple, to curved hooks and all sorts of magnificent shapes, Dr Liew says.

"Your choices vary, and our guidance should vary, based on severity or the complex nature of the extraction. For example, if the tooth has very hooked roots and is close to a vital structure like a nerve, you may find the dentist recommends going under a general anaesthetic or to a specialist best placed to manage it."

AFTER CARE

In Dr Liew's clinic, after a simple tooth extraction, the socket is stitched closed (sometimes with the addition of a healing sponge) and you head home to rest with basic pain relievers like paracetamol.

Recovery is an individual experience, including the amount of pain and swelling you experience after the procedure. A straightforward extraction might see patients feeling good within one week or two weeks, says Dr Liew, whereas a complex surgical wisdom tooth extraction might see patients experience an ache for up to a week, then take from two weeks to two months more for full healing of the area.

After some initial discomfort you'll find yourself back on your way to having healthier, trouble-free teeth and gums.

The Australian Dental Association recommends you check with your dentist about any COVID-19 rules in place that could affect your procedure. 🦷



DR STEPHEN LIEW

Australian Dental Association federal executive and dentist

Little chompers

If your child needs to have a tooth out, the good news is that kids' teeth usually have smaller, shorter and simpler roots than adults, and are simpler to remove. "It's rare for a child to experience complex extraction," assures Dr Liew.

To put kids at ease, Dr Liew says he uses a technique called Tell, Show and Do. "In other words, you never do anything until you've discussed what you're going to do, you've shown them what things look like, how you'll use them and the sensations they might feel." These steps help children feel like they're part of the process.



HCF members can access high-quality low-cost services at HCF's 14 dental centres. Members on eligible extras cover can claim 100% back on a range of preventive dental services at HCF Dental Centres and More for Teeth providers (depending on level of cover and available limits). This includes at least one annual check-up, scale and clean and fluoride treatment. To see if you're eligible, visit [hcf.com.au](https://www.hcf.com.au) or call 13 13 34.

For tips on preparing for a tooth extraction, read the tooth extraction section at [hcf.com.au/preparing-for-hospital](https://www.hcf.com.au/preparing-for-hospital)

GET AHEAD OF THE TEST

WHAT YOU WEAR FOR YOUR NEXT MEDICAL TEST CAN MAKE YOUR EXPERIENCE SAFER, MORE COMFORTABLE AND A LOT LESS AWKWARD. HERE'S WHAT TO EXPECT AND HOW TO PREPARE.

Words Karen Burge

Sometimes we're booked in for tests and exams we've never experienced before. But if you think ahead about what to wear to your tests, the experience may be far less confronting. Here's how to walk into the clinic knowing you're fully prepared (post-COVID, you may need to wear a mask and take your own pen).

BLOOD TEST

If you're having blood drawn, a pathology collector will need access to the veins in your mid-arm (at the front of your elbow) and your upper arm to apply a tourniquet. Wear loose clothing that gives easy access to these areas. **Think t-shirts, sleeveless tops or shirts with sleeves that roll up all the way.**

SKIN CHECK

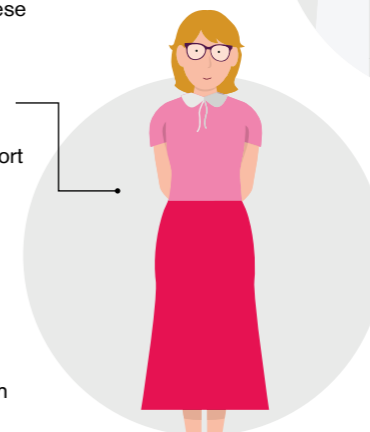
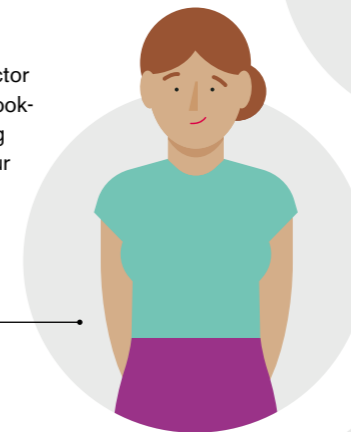
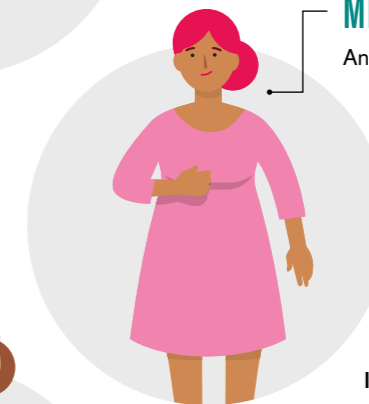
During a skin cancer check your doctor will give all of your skin a thorough look-over. Sydney GP Dr Ginni Mansberg says you'll need to strip down to your underwear, so expect to remove all your other clothes. You'll also need to take off your socks, she adds, as you can get melanomas between your toes and under your feet.

MAMMOGRAM

A mammogram is an X-ray of breast tissue to check for breast cancer. As you'll need to press your breasts between X-ray plates, **it's best to wear a two-piece outfit with a separate top**, so you can keep your lower half clothed during the test, advises BreastScreen NSW. Avoid wearing deodorant, talcum powder or creams on the day, as these can show up on your x-ray.

CERVICAL SCREENING TEST

Dr Mansberg says dressing for comfort will help you relax for your cervical screening test (used to be called a pap smear) and make the procedure easier for your doctor. "Some doctors' rooms don't have a private area for you to get undressed and it can be uncomfortable to take your clothes off in front of people, in which case I'd recommend a long skirt."



GENERAL X-RAY

Depending on the area being imaged, you may need to remove some clothes or wear a medical gown for your X-ray, as some clothes can make it difficult to see the images clearly, explains the Royal Australia and New Zealand College of Radiologists. Remove metal items, such as watches, necklaces and earrings.

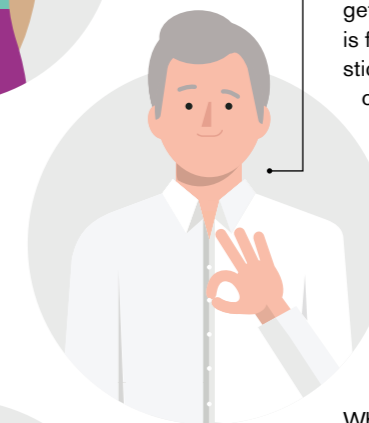
MRI

An MRI involves entering a tunnel that uses magnets and radiofrequency pulses. Because of this magnetic action, you can't wear metal, like zips, hooks or wire in clothing, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists explains. Avoid jewellery, belts, watches and hairpins, and put away phones and credit cards.

Wear clothing that's loose and light – no activewear – and avoid makeup or hairspray, too, as these can contain tiny metal particles that could interfere with the scan or cause harm.

ELECTROCARDIOGRAM (ECG)

Your doctor might order an ECG to get some insight into how your heart is functioning. During your test, small sticky dots and wire leads are stuck on your chest, arms and legs, and the leads are connected to the ECG machine, explains the Heart Foundation. To help give easy access and for your comfort, **wear something that opens easily at the front, such as a button-up shirt.**



DENTAL X-RAY

Whether you're having an orthopantomogram (an OPG – standing with your chin resting on a small shelf) or a lateral cephalogram (standing with your head against a plate, with supports in each ear), all head, neck and face jewellery should be removed. Metallic objects can create 'ghosts' on your images, potentially corrupting the X-ray. Mouth piercings that can be hard to remove, such as tongue rings, are best discussed with your dentist. 🦷

SOURCES: BETTER HEALTH CHANNEL, BREASTSCREEN NSW, CANCER COUNCIL, CANCER COUNCIL QUEENSLAND, DENTOMAXILLOFACIAL RADIOLOGY, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, HEALTHDIRECT, HEART FOUNDATION, NHS, NSW MINISTRY OF HEALTH, ROYAL AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND COLLEGE OF RADIOLOGISTS, UCLA BRAIN MAPPING CENTER, PHOTO: ISTOCK