

Remove false teeth before general anesthetic, doctors warn

13 August 2019



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False teeth need to be taken out before a general anaesthetic, doctors warn in the journal *BMJ Case Reports* after a 72 year old's dentures got stuck in his throat during surgery to remove a harmless lump in his abdominal wall, and weren't discovered for eight days.

Aside from experiencing considerable pain, bleeding, and swallowing difficulties, the oversight led to repeated [hospital visits](#), additional invasive tests, [blood](#) transfusions, and eventually more surgery for the man.

The doctors describe how six days after abdominal surgery, the man turned up at A&E complaining of blood in the mouth and swallowing difficulties and pain, which had prevented him from eating [solid food](#) ever since.

Nothing in his test results prompted doctors to consider anything other than a respiratory infection and the side effects of having had a tube down his throat during his operation. He was therefore prescribed mouthwash, antibiotics and steroids,

and sent home.

Two days later he returned with worsening symptoms. He had been unable to swallow any of the medicine he had been prescribed. He was admitted to hospital with suspected aspiration pneumonia—a severe chest infection usually caused by inhaling food or stomach acid or saliva into the lungs.

During this hospital stay, a diagnostic procedure to look at his throat and voice box revealed a semi-circular object lying across his [vocal cords](#), which had clearly caused internal swelling and blistering.

When this was explained to him, the man revealed that his dentures, which consisted of a metal roof plate and three false teeth, had been lost during his previous hospital stay.

He then had [emergency surgery](#) to remove the dentures and was discharged after six days. But six days later a bout of bleeding prompted his return. As tests revealed the bleeding had stopped, he was sent home, only to reappear 10 days later with the same problem.

After a couple of days he was again discharged, but returned six days later because of further bleeding. Tests revealed that he had internal wound tissue around the site of the blistering which was cauterised to prevent further bleeding. Because he had lost so much blood, he also required a blood transfusion.

He was discharged after two days, but returned again nine days later with further bleeding, which required emergency [surgery](#) as the source of the bleed was a torn artery in the wound.

A check-up a week after this procedure showed that the tissue was healing well, and six weeks later he had not needed further emergency care and his blood count was back to normal.

The authors note that this isn't the first documented case of dentures being inhaled while anaesthetic is being infused.

"There are no set national guidelines on how dentures should be managed during anaesthesia, but it is known that leaving dentures in during bag-mask ventilation allows for a better seal during induction [when the anaesthetic is being infused], and therefore many hospitals allow dentures to be removed immediately before intubation [when a tube is inserted into the airway to assist breathing]," write the authors.

The presence of any false teeth or dental plates should be clearly documented before and after any surgical procedure, with all members of the surgical team made aware of what is to be done with them, they add.

More information: Harriet A Cunniffe, Dentures discovered in larynx 8 days after general anaesthetic, *BMJ Case Reports* (2019). [DOI: 10.1136/bcr-2019-230055](https://doi.org/10.1136/bcr-2019-230055)

Provided by British Medical Journal

APA citation: Remove false teeth before general anesthetic, doctors warn (2019, August 13) retrieved 6 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-08-false-teeth-anesthetic-doctors.html>

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