



Tooth abscess

This information sheet from Great Ormond Street Hospital explains the causes, symptoms and treatment of tooth abscesses and where to get help

A tooth abscess is a collection of pus caused by a bacterial infection. It can form on the inside of the tooth (a periapical abscess) or the surrounding gum (a periodontal abscess).

Although tooth abscesses are a fairly common dental condition, they need to be treated quickly to reduce the risk of more serious infections.

What causes a tooth abscess?

Periapical abscesses are usually a result of tooth decay, caused by the plaque and sugar interaction. When decay reaches the centre of the tooth, it kills the nerve and the infection collects as an abscess.

Periodontal abscesses are usually caused by gum disease. The bacteria in plaque can irritate the gums and cause inflammation (swelling). Gradually, the connection between the tooth and gum loosens, leaving a space in which bacteria can collect and form an abscess.

What are the signs and symptoms of a tooth abscess?

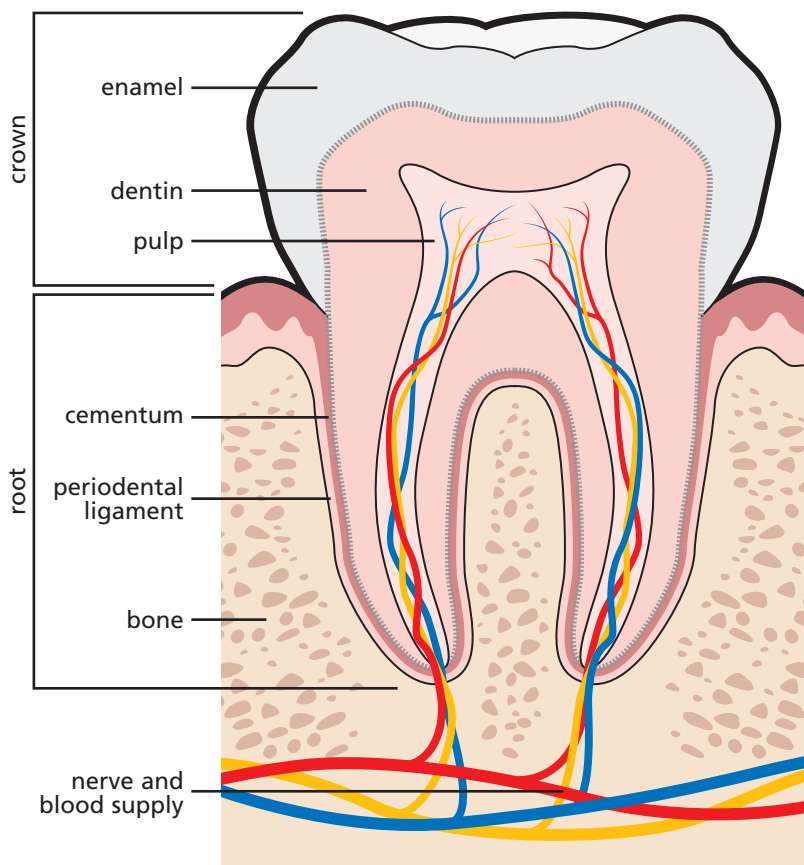
Tooth abscesses can be very painful. The area will be extremely tender and a child may also have:

- swollen gums or a swollen face
- an unpleasant taste in their mouth
- a high temperature

An abscess draining through the gum may appear as a sinus or 'pimple' on the gum beside the infected tooth.

How is a tooth abscess normally diagnosed?

If a child has a tooth abscess, they should visit a dentist as soon as possible.





How is a tooth abscess normally treated?

Painkillers should only be used as a temporary solution until the child is able to see the dentist.

Treatment involves removing the source of infection. This will involve:

- extraction of the abscessed tooth
- root canal treatment (removal of the infected nerve). This is only an option for adult teeth.

Antibiotics may be prescribed to reduce the infection.

What happens next?

The child should feel well again after treatment, although the area may still feel sensitive and swollen for a couple of days.

The best way to prevent a recurrence of infection is to encourage good oral hygiene. This will remove the dental plaque that can cause tooth decay or gum disease.

Keep an eye on the amount of sugary food a child eats and make sure they visit their dentist for regular check-ups (every six months).

Further help and advice

Talk to the child's doctor or health visitor.

Contact the British Dental Health Foundation – an independent charity working to improve standards of oral care.

British Dental Health Foundation

Tel (Dental Helpline): 0845 063 1188

Website: www.dentalhealth.org