



## Advice for patients with a suspected dental abscess

### What is a dental abscess?

A dental abscess is when an infection causes a collection of pus to develop in or around the teeth or gums. These can occur when bacteria gets into the gums or teeth due to tooth decay or sometimes because of trauma.

### How do I know if I have a dental abscess?

Symptoms that may suggest a dental abscess include pain or swelling in your gum, high temperature, or a horrible taste in your mouth. More severe symptoms can include feeling unwell and difficulty opening your mouth.

### What do I do if I think I may have a dental abscess?

It is best to see your dentist as soon as possible for an urgent assessment. Your dentist should usually arrange to see you within 48 hours. In the mean time you should take regular pain-killers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen to help control your symptoms.

### Why can't I just see my GP for treatment?

Definitive treatment for a dental abscess can only be given by a dentist, not your GP. The NICE (National Institute of Clinical Excellence) guidelines states patients should be seen by a dentist for assessment as soon as possible. GPs are not trained in managing dental problems and simply treating with antibiotics will not eliminate the source of infection. Sometimes dental abscesses can lead to serious complications if not managed appropriately by seeing a dentist. This can include loss of the affected tooth, but can also lead to spread of infection to the bone or brain causing sepsis, which is a life-threatening systemic infection. Furthermore, if prescribed an antibiotic by your GP, this can potentially mask the condition and make it harder for your dentist to diagnose, leading to a delay in definitive management.

- If you are not registered with a local dentist, it's a good idea to do so before you have any issues and to ensure you get regular check-ups. You can find your local dentist at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).
- If you are not registered with a dentist and have a dental emergency, please call 111 for advice.