

Understanding Jaw (Orthognathic) Surgery

A jaw that's too small, too large, or crooked can cause problems with chewing, speaking, breathing, and even sleeping. The shape of your jaws also affects the way your face looks. Orthognathic surgery is treatment that reshapes the jaw to improve its form and function.

How orthognathic surgery can help

Some people are born with a jaw that is not aligned well. Some people develop problems as the bones grow or because of an injury. Orthognathic surgery realigns facial bones and makes jaws work together better. Surgery is only 1 part of the treatment process. In most cases, treatment to move and straighten the teeth (orthodontics) is needed before and after surgery. These treatments can relieve problems caused by teeth and jaws that are out of alignment.

Your treatment plan

Orthognathic surgery and related treatments can take time, often over a year. It's important to follow through with all treatment after you start. Starting treatment and not completing it could leave you with more problems than you have now. You need to commit to the process before treatment begins. Your plan will likely include a time frame for each stage of treatment. Typical stages and time frames are shown here:

Stage	Duration	Description
Diagnosis and treatment plan	1 to 4 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exams and tests
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Surgeon and orthodontist consult together
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet with team members to discuss overall plan
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dental work
Preparation for surgery	12 to 18 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Orthodontic work (braces) and regular checkups
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet with surgeon to prepare for surgery and recovery
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quit smoking (if you smoke)
Surgery and hospital recovery	1 to 3 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Surgery
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In some cases, the jaws may be kept immobile using wire or elastic rubber bands
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation in the hospital while you recover from anesthesia and get started on a liquid diet
Recovery at home	2 to 6 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rest at home; on a soft diet for 2 or more weeks
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Postoperative exam by surgeon

Stage	Duration	Description
Postsurgical treatment	6 to 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gradual return to normal eating and normal oral hygiene
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete orthodontic treatment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow-up with surgeon as needed
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Routine dental care
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other dental care, if needed

If you have questions

Be sure you understand what each step involves. Ask what you can and can't expect from treatment. Keep in mind that treatment plans can differ. They depend on your jaw problem, and factors such as your age and oral health. Your healthcare provider can answer your questions and address your concerns.