

JAW FRACTURE REPAIR DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS

MAXILLOMANDIBULAR MINI PLATES AND SCREWS FIXATION

Your pet's jaw fracture was repaired using small titanium or stainless-steel plates and screws surgically placed along the bone. This rigid internal fixation provides strong, stable support that allows immediate function and typically does not require removal unless complications develop. Plates may be placed on the outside (lateral) or inside (medial) surface of the jawbone.

What to Expect in Your Pet's Mouth

- **No visible hardware inside the mouth** in most cases (plates are hidden under gums or on outer jaw surface)
 - **Possible small metal bump** felt along the jawline under the skin
 - **Incision line** on the skin under the jaw or along the cheek, closed with sutures or staples
 - **Mild swelling** of the face and jaw for 10-14 days
 - **Bruising** on the skin under the chin or near the eye
 - **More stable jaw function** compared to wire repair, with better ability to eat
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How to Check the Surgery Site

1. **Feel along the jawline gently** for the plate (small ridge under skin)
 2. **Inspect the skin incision** if visible—should be clean, dry, and closing
 3. **Watch your pet eat and drink**—jaw should move symmetrically without clicking
 4. Look inside mouth for:
 - **Teeth meeting normally** (occlusion should be stable)
 - **No exposed metal** through gums or cheek
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Complications Specific to Plate and Screw Repair

- **Screw Loosening or Backing Out**
 - Screws lose grip in bone or gradually work their way out

- Plate becomes unstable, fracture loses alignment
 - **What to look for:** Small metal screw head visible in mouth or poking through skin, sudden lump on jaw that moves when pressed, clicking sensation when pet chews, return of pain or reluctance to eat hard food, malocclusion developing weeks after surgery
 - **Plate Breakage or Bending**
 - Plate fails from excessive chewing forces, incomplete fracture healing, or trauma
 - **What to look for:** Visible deformity of jaw contour, sudden change in bite (teeth not meeting), swelling returning at fracture site, palpable gap or movement where plate was solid before, metal visible through gums inside the mouth or through skin under the jaw or along the cheek
 - **Soft Tissue Impingement or Exposure**
 - Plate or screw rubs against tissue causing ulceration, or breaks through skin/gums
 - **What to look for:** Metal visible through gums inside mouth or through skin incision, non-healing sore or draining tract on face, chronic clear or bloody discharge from incision site, bad odor, pet constantly rubbing or pawing at face
 - **Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Problems**
 - Plate placement sometimes alters jaw mechanics or fracture extends into joint
 - **What to look for:** Inability to open mouth fully, clicking or popping at back of jaw when eating, jaw locking open or closed, pain when pet yawns, head tilted to one side, reluctance to chew on one side
 - **Plate-Related Osteomyelitis (Bone Infection) or Bone Resorption**
 - Infection around hardware or stress shielding or reaction to metal plate can cause bone infection or resorption
 - **What to look for:** Persistent draining tract that never heals, bone visible through skin or gum hole, fever, lethargy, swelling that improves then worsens cyclically, palpable plate that becomes increasingly prominent as bone shrinks away
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Emergency Signs — Call Immediately

- Screw or plate becomes visible through skin or gums
 - Sudden inability to open or close the mouth
 - Plate breakage with visible jaw deformity
 - Severe swelling with fever and lethargy
 - Eye swelling or pain (possible retrobulbar abscess from deep infection)
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GENERAL NOTES

Healing Time: Jaw fractures typically take 6-8 weeks to heal, but may require 12 weeks in older animals, diabetics, or those with poor nutrition.

Follow-up Radiographs: Essential at 6-8 weeks to confirm bone healing before allowing normal activity or chew toys.

Hardware Removal: Wire and composite are always removed after healing. Plates and screws may remain unless they cause problems, though removal requires second surgery.

Permanent Changes: Some malocclusion or slight jaw asymmetry may persist even after successful healing—this is usually cosmetic and does not affect function.