

## NURSING CLINICAL STANDARD

**WIRED JAW**

- PURPOSE:** To outline the nursing care, safety measures and patient/caretakers education for a patient with a wired jaw.
- SUPPORTIVE DATA:** The arch bar, wires and elastics are to keep the jaw wired together after an oral maxillofacial injury or surgery. They are intended to keep the jaw from moving and to allow the bones to heal in the correct position. Usually the jaw will be wired together for approximately 6 – 8 weeks.
- A patient with a wired jaw requires a special provider ordered “wired jaw” diet in which fluids and foods are blended to be consumed through a straw. Consult with Food and Nutrition department as needed.
- Wire cutters must be available at the bedside at all times for emergent intervention by Oral & Maxillofacial (OMF) surgery.  
(Exception: For patients who are at risk for injuring themselves or others, wire cutters may not be kept at the bedside but must be immediately available.)  
In the event that the wires may be interfering with ventilation, or if there is an imminent risk for aspiration, immediately notify OMF to determine if cutting the wires is indicated. If OMF is not available notify the primary provider to make the determination and cut the wires if necessary.
- ASSESSMENT:**
1. Assess post-placement and a minimum of every 4 hours for:
    - Airway patency and breathing difficulty
    - Presence of nasopharyngeal airway at bedside
    - Presence of wire cutters at bedside (or immediately available as applicable)
    - Pain or discomfort
    - Facial swelling and/or discoloration
    - Ability to swallow
    - Presence of nausea or vomiting
    - Presence of oral bleeding
- INTERVENTIONS:**
2. Implement the following post wire placement:
    - Administer pain medications as ordered
    - Provide oral care as ordered.
    - Use a soft toothbrush and avoid vigorous motion to the gum line.
    - Apply ice pack for the first 24 hours over surgery site as ordered (20 minutes on, 20 minutes off) to reduce swelling or discomfort
    - Provide adequate fluids and diet as ordered to maintain hydration and nutrition
    - Position the patient to maximize effective respirations (e.g. head of bed elevated, use of 2 pillows)
  3. Ensure that patient is on wired jaw diet.
- SAFETY:**
4. Ensure availability of wire cutters at bedside at all times for emergent intervention.
  5. Ensure that suction equipment is available at the bedside at all times.

6. Call provider immediately for urgent airway and breathing difficulty to determine need to immediately release the wires and/or provide airway support.
7. Ensure the wire cutters are kept with the patient if patient is transported to other areas of the hospital for diagnostic tests or therapeutic interventions.

PATIENT/CARETAKER  
TEACHING:

8. Instruct patient/caretaker regarding the following:
  - Oral care and mouth rinses
  - Adequate fluids and nutrition
  - Taking pain medication as ordered
  - Taking prescribed antibiotic as directed for the specified number of days
  - Avoiding the following:
    - smoking
    - taking aspirin
    - hot food or liquids
    - alcoholic beverages
    - spicy foods
    - strenuous activity
    - chewing
  - Steps to follow in case of vomiting
    - bend forward or roll onto side to prevent aspiration
    - hold inner cheek out to make the vomit easier to expel
    - take prescribed antiemetic if nausea persists
  - Follow wired jaw discharge instructions including:
    - wired jaw diet
    - prescribed medications
    - oral care
    - follow-up clinic appointment
  - Contact provider for reportable symptoms

REPORTABLE  
CONDITIONS:

9. Notify Provider if patient experiences:
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Persistent unrelieved pain
  - Persistent nasal stuffiness or feeling of airway obstruction
  - Persistent nausea and vomiting
  - Difficulty swallowing
  - Extension of facial swelling/discoloration
  - Temperature of 38.3 ° Celsius (101° Fahrenheit) or greater
  - Increased oral mucosal irritation
  - Oral bleeding

ADDITIONAL  
STANDARDS:

10. Refer to the following as indicated:
  - Artificial Airway - ICU
  - Pain management

DOCUMENTATION:

11. Document in accordance with “Documentation” standards and Pain Management Nursing Policy.
12. Document presence of wire cutters at bedside on Quick View navigator band, Environmental Safety Measures section.

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