

Let's Talk About...

Jaw, wired

Jaw wiring, also called maxillo-mandibular (max-ILL-oh-man-DIB-you-lar) fixation, or MMF, is a procedure where the jaw bones are wired together.

Why does my child need their jaw wired shut?

Your child may need their jaw wired if:

- They have jaw problems that need to be fixed
- Their jaw bones are not aligned correctly
- They've damaged their jaw in an accident

What happens when my child has their jaw wired shut?

To wire your child's jaw bones together:

- The oral surgeon attaches arch bars to both the upper and lower gums. The arch bars extend from the back tooth on one side and around to the back tooth on the other side.
- The surgeon then attaches thin wires or elastics from the upper arch bar to the lower arch bar. There are usually two wires or elastics in the back near the rear teeth and two in the front. These keep the jaw closed.

Small children can't have bars because their teeth aren't strong enough. The surgeon may put separate wires or elastics around the upper jawbone (maxilla) and lower jawbone (mandible). These are then secured to each other to close the jaw. This procedure is called circummandibular (SIR-cum-man-DIB-you-lar) wiring.

What can I expect after my child's jaw is wired shut?

Your child may have a numb upper and lower jaw for 1–2 months after surgery. They may drool because of this numbness. Have a soft cloth on hand to wipe away any extra spit that comes from your child's mouth.



How do I care for my child's mouth?

It is important to build a daily routine when caring for your child's mouth. A daily routine includes:

- Help your child brush their teeth at least twice a day. Their gums may be tender, so a soft toothbrush can help.
- Make sure your child cleans their mouth at least twice a day. They can swish and spit salt water (normal saline) or use mouthwash the surgeon prescribed.
- Keep your child's lips hydrated using lip balm.
- Look inside your child's mouth every day to make sure there are no problems with the wires or infections.
- Use dental wax (found at pharmacies or dental offices) to cover the sharp ends of wires to prevent sores inside your child's mouth. When the wax wears off, you need to put it on again.

Do not use sponges in your child's mouth. The sponge may stick to the wires.

After the surgeon wires the jaws, it will be hard for your child to spit things out. There is a chance your child can choke and get food and liquids in their lungs. Watch your child carefully while they eat or drink or if they say they feel sick.

What food can my child eat when their jaw is wired shut?

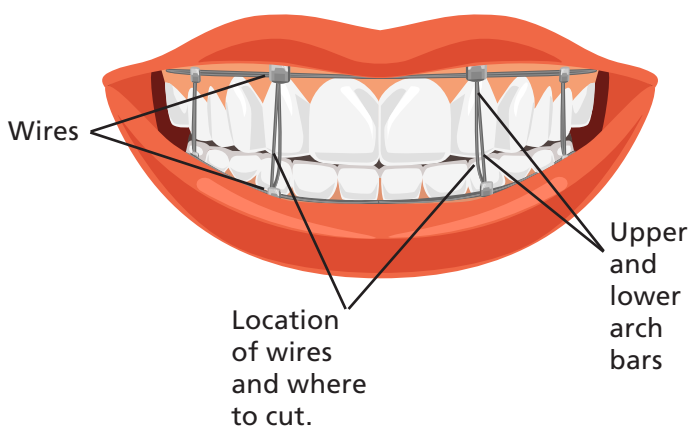
Your child should only eat pureed or soft foods while their jaw is wired shut. Make sure they always sit up while eating so they don't choke on their food. It will be harder for your child to eat while their jaw is wired shut, and they may not want to eat as much. Some children lose a few pounds at first while adjusting to different food.

A dietitian will talk to you about changing your child's diet and "power-packing." This is a way to add calories to food while your child eats less.

What if my child gets sick?

If your child throws up, encourage them to swallow the fluid or spit it out through the sides of their mouth.

If they choke on vomit or can't catch their breath, cut the wires or elastics straight across with the wire cutters from the hospital. Then call your child's surgeon.



What should I do in an emergency?

Keep wire cutters with you all the time, and make sure your child takes them to school in case of an emergency.

In any emergency where your child cannot breathe, cut the wires or elastics with the wire cutters. Then call your child's surgeon or take your child to the emergency room. The surgeon may need to do surgery again or reinstall the bands.

Call your child's surgeon or take your child to the emergency room if:

- Your child says they can't feel their lip or has trouble moving their tongue
- Your child has trouble breathing
- Your child has pain and pain medicine does not help
- Your child's mouth is bleeding
- Your child is throwing up
- The jaw wires have broken or are loose

Notes

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