

CASE REPORT

Surgical Management of Orofacial Communication Following Tooth Extraction in an Area Affected by Odontoma: A Clinical Case Report

Manejo quirúrgico de la comunicación orofacial tras la extracción dental en una zona afectada por un odontoma: un caso clínico

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Odontomas are the most frequent benign odontogenic tumors and can lead to local anatomical changes that increase the risk of surgical complications. One such complication, often seen after procedures in the posterior maxillary region, is the development of orofacial communication.

Case Report: a 62-year-old male patient developed orofacial communication following a tooth extraction in an area previously affected by an odontoma. A computed tomography scan revealed a large lesion and disruption of the floor of the right maxillary sinus. Surgical intervention was performed to close the orofacial communication and excise the lesion, which was histopathologically confirmed as an odontoma.

Conclusion: large odontomas located in regions prone to orofacial communication pose challenges to surgical management. In this case, the chosen surgical approach was effective in both removing the lesion and achieving successful closure of the communication, with stable results observed over a 24-month follow-up period.

Keywords: Odontoma; Orofacial Communication; Postoperative Complications; Computed Tomography; Oral Surgery.

RESUMEN

Introducción: los odontomas son los tumores odontogénicos benignos más frecuentes y pueden provocar cambios anatómicos locales que aumentan el riesgo de complicaciones quirúrgicas. Una de estas complicaciones, que se observa con frecuencia tras intervenciones en la región maxilar posterior, es la aparición de una comunicación orofacial.

Informe del caso: un paciente varón de 62 años desarrolló una comunicación oroantral tras una extracción dental en una zona previamente afectada por un odontoma. Una tomografía computarizada reveló una lesión grande y una rotura del suelo del seno maxilar derecho. Se realizó una intervención quirúrgica para cerrar la comunicación oroantral y extirpar la lesión, que se confirmó histopatológicamente como un odontoma.

Conclusión: los odontomas grandes situados en regiones propensas a la comunicación oroantral plantean dificultades para el tratamiento quirúrgico. En este caso, el enfoque quirúrgico elegido fue eficaz tanto para extirpar la lesión como para cerrar con éxito la comunicación, con resultados estables observados durante un periodo de seguimiento de 24 meses.

Palabras clave: Odontoma; Comunicación Orofacial; Complicaciones Postoperatorias; Tomografía Computarizada; Cirugía Oral.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), among all classified and documented odontogenic tumors, odontomas are the most prevalent in the oral cavity, accounting for approximately 67 % of all cases. These lesions are entirely benign in nature, as they result from the proliferation of both epithelial and mesenchymal odontogenic cells. Odontomas are considered hamartomas rather than true neoplasms; they are developmental anomalies characterized by limited and slow growth, as well as structural disorganization. Despite this, they show full differentiation of dental tissues, including enamel, dentin, cementum, and pulp.^(1,2,3,4)

Its etiology remains not fully understood, although several authors suggest that its development may be linked to factors such as infections, genetic mutations, trauma, hereditary conditions, and systemic diseases. Most odontomas are asymptomatic and painless; however, they may be detected in cases of delayed eruption of permanent teeth, displacement of adjacent teeth, or the presence of localized infections with or without swelling. In most instances, they are identified incidentally through routine or targeted radiographic imaging.^(5,6,7,8)

In the early stages, histological examination reveals varying proportions of forming mesenchymal tissue and odontogenic epithelium. Most odontomas are intraosseous lesions; however, in rare instances, they may affect the gingival soft tissues, in which case they are referred to as peripheral odontomas. A rarer variant, known as dilated odontoma, is considered a dental anomaly. It results from an invagination of the enamel surface into the developing tooth and is regarded as the most severe form of the dens invaginatus anomaly. This variant is radiographically distinct, often presenting as a doughnut-shaped structure with a central soft tissue core surrounded by disorganized hard dental tissues.^(3,9,10) According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the most common classifications of odontomas are compound and complex types.^(7,8,11)

In terms of prevalence, compound odontomas are more common than complex ones.⁽³⁾ Compound odontomas are typically found in the anterior maxillary region and are characterized by the presence of multiple tooth-like structures. These structures result from a normal or partial division of the dental papilla. On radiographic examination, they appear as multiple radiopaque denticles surrounded by a radiolucent zone, which histologically corresponds to a loose fibrous stroma. Due to their distinctive radiographic features, histopathological analysis is often unnecessary. In contrast, complex odontomas are more frequently located in the mandibular region. Radiographically, they present as an irregular, radiopaque mass composed of disorganized dental tissues, including dentin and clusters of enamel matrix, typically surrounded by a radiolucent halo. Because they lack clearly defined features, differential diagnosis is essential. Lesions that may mimic complex odontomas include osteomas, dentigerous cysts, and keratocysts.^(4,12,13,14)

Odontomas are most commonly identified during the first two decades of life, with a peak incidence in adolescence. Their diameter typically does not exceed the size of a normal tooth. However, when an odontoma grows beyond 6 cm, it may lead to expansion and distortion of the jawbones, potentially resulting in significant anatomical changes, bone resorption, and displacement of adjacent structures.^(3,4,10)

The treatment for both compound and complex odontomas is conservative, aiming at the complete surgical removal of the lesion.^(13,14) The approach may vary depending on the location, size, and proximity to adjacent anatomical structures. Many authors describe the surgical technique for odontoma removal as relatively straightforward, often resembling the procedure used for extracting impacted teeth. Because the lesion is typically encapsulated in a fibrous connective tissue, total enucleation can be achieved without compromising surrounding structures.^(6,8,15)

Although odontomas are benign, their removal is essential to prevent complications such as tooth impaction or secondary infections, with the overall goal of preserving and promoting the patient's oral health. The prognosis is generally favorable, and recurrence is considered rare.^(12,16)

However, despite several authors reporting that the surgical procedure is generally straightforward and associated with favorable outcomes, complications may still arise. In a study by Memarpour, the author described the challenges encountered during the removal of a giant mandibular odontoma, highlighting the potential risk of bone fracture. The present article reports a case in which the size and location of the odontoma, being in close proximity to the maxillary sinus, led to surgical difficulties during tooth extraction and subsequently resulted in an oroantral communication.

Humans have two maxillary sinuses, one on each side of the face, located within the maxillary bone. These structures are classified as pneumatic cavities, meaning they contain air-filled spaces. Their primary functions include protecting intracranial and infraorbital structures, absorbing impact in cases of facial trauma, reducing the overall weight of the skull, warming, filtering, and humidifying inhaled air, and contributing to voice resonance.⁽¹⁷⁾

One pathology associated with the maxillary sinuses is buccosinus communication (BSC), also known as oroantral communication. This condition involves a direct connection between the oral cavity and the maxillary sinus, most commonly caused by extractions of posterior maxillary teeth, particularly when the roots of molars are in close proximity to the sinus floor. Other potential causes include residual dental infections, trauma, removal of cysts or tumors, dental implant procedures, osteomyelitis, orthognathic surgery, and radiotherapy.^(18,19)

Buccosinus communication (BSC) can be diagnosed through clinical maneuvers such as the Valsalva test, as well as imaging examinations including radiographs and computed tomography scans.⁽²⁰⁾ If left untreated, BSC may lead to various complications, such as alteration of the maxillary sinus bacterial flora resulting in acute sinusitis, difficulty swallowing liquids and food, frontal headaches, halitosis, taste disturbances, nasal discharge, and/or nasal obstruction, depending on the affected sinus.^(21,22)

The treatment plan is established based on the location, extent, and cause of the communication. Surgical techniques commonly employed include pedicled buccal fat pad flaps (Bichat's fat pad), palatal rotational flaps, vestibular sliding flaps, bone grafts, and the application of platelet-rich fibrin (PRF).^(18,22) Additionally, pharmacological management with antibiotics, anti-inflammatory drugs, analgesics, and nasal decongestants if necessary is essential. Prompt and appropriate treatment is crucial to restore patient comfort and oral health.^(21,23)

Therefore, the aim of this study is to present a case report of oroantral communication following tooth extraction in a region affected by a compound odontoma, discussing the predisposing factors and the therapeutic approach adopted.

CASE REPORT

Patient G.R.S., a 62-year-old male with leucoderma, sought dental care at a private clinic complaining of severe sinusitis persisting for 8 months. According to his report, he had undergone a tooth extraction procedure in the same area 3 years prior, after which he noticed the development of an oroantral communication. He underwent three unsuccessful surgical attempts to close the communication before presenting to our clinic. Regarding his medical and local health history, the patient is a smoker, has diabetes, poor oral hygiene, and a past history of bacterial endocarditis. Clinical examination using a probe revealed an oroantral communication without discharge, and the soft tissues showed signs of previous surgical manipulation. Panoramic radiograph (figura 1) and computed tomography imaging (figure 2) demonstrated a large, hyperdense lesion with characteristics consistent with a compound odontoma occupying the alveolar ridge and invading the right maxillary sinus. Residual root fragments and the area of oroantral communication were also clearly identified.



Figure 1. Initial panoramic radiograph obtained during the clinical evaluation phase of the case

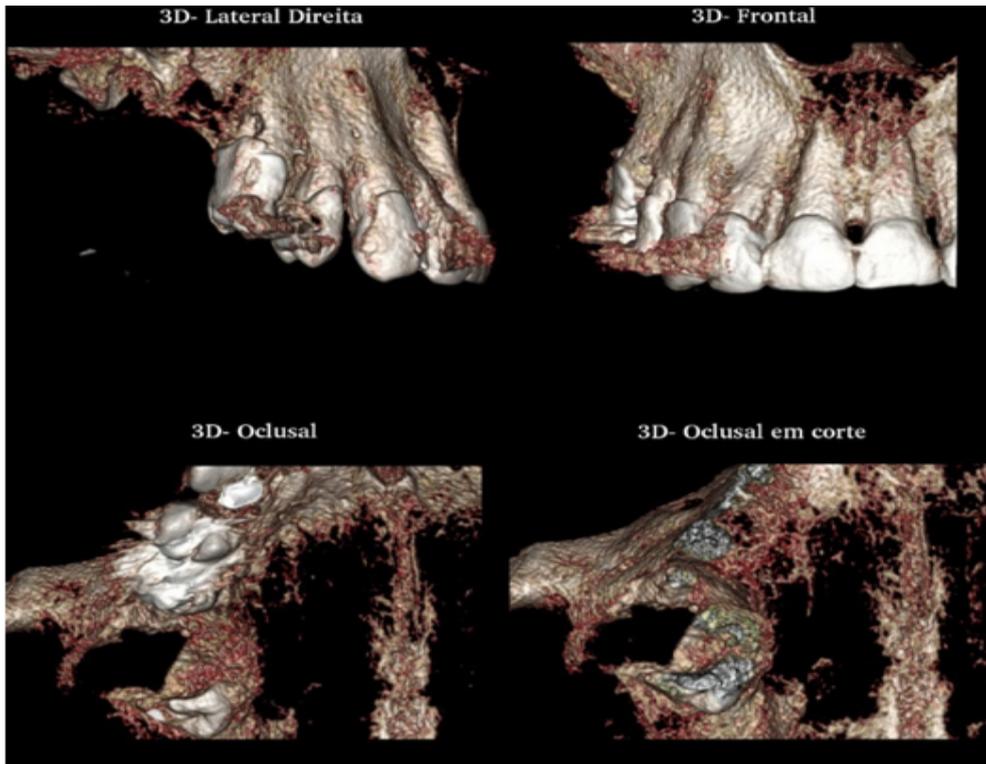


Figure 2. Computed tomography showing an extensive hyperdense lesion with features compatible with a compound odontoma, occupying the alveolar ridge and invading the right maxillary sinus. Root remnants and an oroantral communication are also observed

The treatment consisted of a surgical procedure performed under general anesthesia, supplemented with local anesthetic infiltration. The primary objective was the complete removal of the lesion and residual root fragments, accompanied by a sinusotomy through the lesion access site. Closure of the mucosa was achieved by primary intention using a vestibular sliding flap.

Incisions were made along the alveolar crest and a mesial vestibular releasing incision was performed, combined with extensive tissue detachment to allow adequate access for lesion and root fragment removal. Mattress sutures were placed at the base of the flap, followed by interrupted and continuous superficial sutures using 4-0 and 5-0 nylon sutures (figure 3).

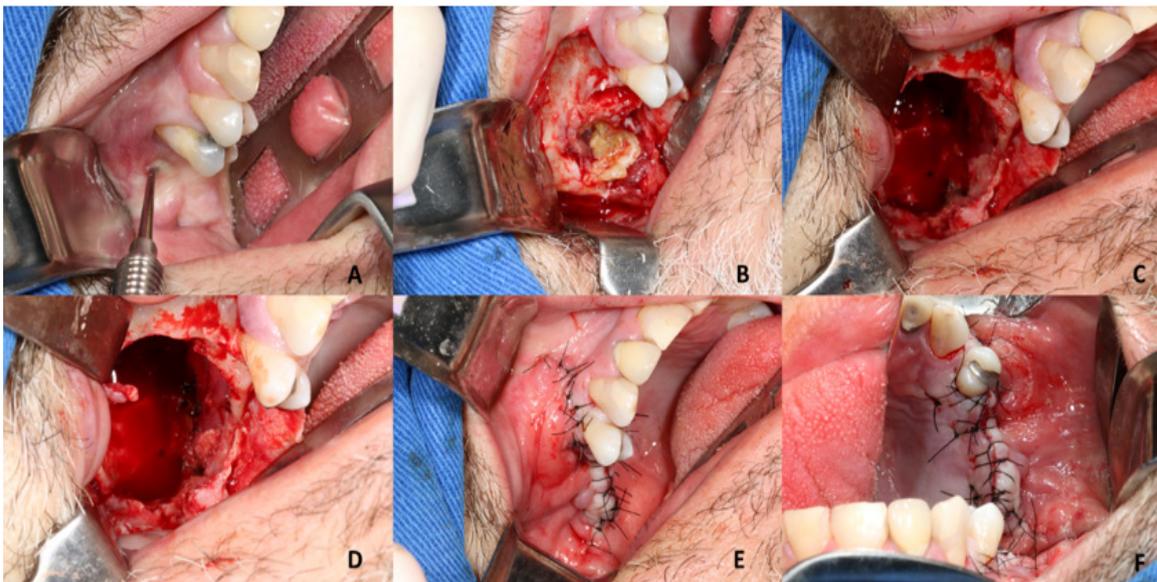


Figure 3. Intraoperative Clinical Aspects. (A) Initial intraoral view showing intact buccal mucosa, discrete ridge elevation, and evidence of a lesion in the posterior superior region. (B) Beginning of surgical access with bone exposure and identification of the lesion area. (C-D) Bone cavity after lesion removal, showing the extent of the defect and the remaining bone tissue. (E-F) Surgical closure of the incision with sutures, demonstrating soft tissue readaptation and good flap positioning

The postoperative computed tomography scan at 18 months revealed the alveolar bone defect caused by the surgical intervention, absence of alveolar bone at the floor of the maxillary sinus, and no signs of secretion or granulation tissue within the sinus cavity. Clinical follow-up over 24 months demonstrated complete mucosal closure, with no evidence of oroantral communication and absence of symptoms (figure 4).

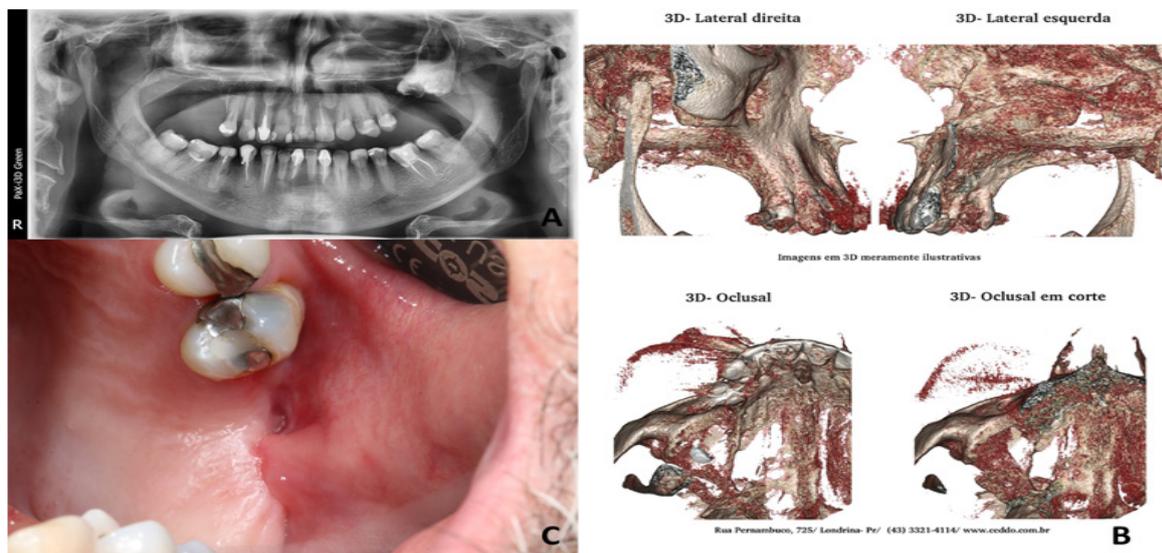


Figure 4. Postoperative Aspects -Tomographic (A-B) and Clinical (C)

DISCUSSION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), odontomas are classified as hamartomas developmental anomalies considered odontogenic tumors due to their origin from tissues that form dental structures.^(7,24) Their etiology is not yet fully understood; however, several authors highlight potential causes such as genetics, trauma, infections, systemic diseases, and heredity.^(5,6,25) These tumors generally exhibit controlled and limited cellular proliferation, are usually asymptomatic, predominantly occur during the second decade of life, and show no gender predilection.^(8,10)

Early diagnosis of odontomas is crucial to prevent complications, as their asymptomatic growth can lead to significant health issues for the patient, as highlighted in this case.⁽²⁶⁾ Panoramic radiographs and computed tomography (CT) scans play an essential role in lesion detection and enable an accurate and definitive diagnosis, while also assessing the integrity of adjacent structures.^(27,28,29) CT imaging stands out as the only technique capable of producing axial, coronal, and sagittal slices, allowing three-dimensional visualization of the lesion, clear differentiation of soft tissue densities without superimposition, detailed evaluation of neighboring structures, and the option for computerized storage and analysis.⁽³⁰⁾

In the present case, computed tomography images of the compound odontoma exhibited typical features described by various authors: a well-organized, hyperdense calcified arrangement with the presence of rudimentary radiopaque dental structures (denticles) surrounded by a radiolucent zone.^(3,31,32,33)

The treatment of compound odontomas involves surgical removal,^(34,35) which should be performed promptly and effectively to avoid various complications such as infection risks, bone destruction, anatomical alterations, and cortical bone expansion.^(33,36) These factors can predispose patients to intraoperative and postoperative complications, as observed in this clinical case. Additionally, a preoperative complication was noted due to the tumor's close proximity to the maxillary sinus, resulting in an oroantral communication, evidenced by a fenestration in the floor of the maxillary sinus in the posterior maxilla region (teeth 18-16) of a male patient in his sixth decade of life. This finding challenges some of the characteristics described in the literature,^(37,38) particularly regarding the surgical procedure's ease and the generally favorable prognosis.

The preexisting anatomical changes caused by the presence of the odontoma created a high-risk scenario due to the oroantral communication, resulting in significant bone resorption in the region affected by the lesion and an intra-sinus periodontal reaction. This was associated with the proximity to vital structures and the loss of the natural bony barrier, contradicting the findings of Mallya and Lam, who suggested that odontomas maintain the cortical boundary. Consequently, this case established an environment conducive to complications such as acute sinusitis, headaches, swallowing difficulties, nasal obstruction and discharge, taste alterations, halitosis, and nocturnal coughing caused by exudate drainage into the pharynx.^(39,40,41,42)

Thus, the factors contributing to the development of oroantral communication in this case were multiple and interconnected: the considerable size of the odontoma extensively affected the posterior maxillary region,

while the preexisting local edentulism of teeth 18, 17, and 16 contributed to regional bone atrophy. This bone resorption occurs continuously and progressively, primarily due to prolonged edentulism, and the resulting loss of bone mass and volume is irreversible.⁽⁴³⁾ Additionally, the lack of proper surgical planning using tomography and the surgeon's limited experience are also considered significant factors in the occurrence of oroantral communication. In this case, the surgical management of the odontoma in close proximity to the maxillary sinus required special considerations.^(4,16)

The management of the oroantral communication posed a significant challenge for the surgeon, requiring careful and detailed planning that took into account the local conditions through preoperative imaging exams, thereby optimizing outcomes for a better prognosis. Batista et al. emphasize that any sinus infection must be eliminated prior to performing surgical closure techniques. However, in this case, the infection was only fully resolved following the surgical sinusotomy procedure.

Various surgical approaches for closing oroantral communications include primary closure, pedicled buccal fat pad flap (Bichat's fat pad), palatal rotational flap, vestibular sliding flap, bone grafts, and the use of platelet-rich fibrin (PRF).^(18,23,44,45,46) In the present case, the technical failures observed in previous closure attempts were attributable to the surgeon's failure to recognize and remove the extensive odontoma.

Postoperative control tomography demonstrated successful removal of the odontomatous lesion, with persistent anatomical alterations of the sinus floor and evidence of bone remodeling in the region. A significant complication observed was discontinuity of the medial wall of the right maxillary sinus, causing communication with the nasal cavity and widespread bone loss. Therefore, cone beam computed tomography proved essential not only for preoperative diagnosis but also for postoperative monitoring.^(47,48,49,50) This imaging modality allowed precise assessment of the odontoma's extent and location, identification of its relationship with critical anatomical structures, detection of the preexisting fenestration in the sinus floor, appropriate surgical planning, and evaluation of postoperative progress. Such a comprehensive diagnostic approach was crucial for effective case management.

This case illustrates the complexity involved in the surgical management of odontomas in critical locations and underscores the importance of thorough preoperative evaluation, proper surgical planning, and careful postoperative follow-up to optimize outcomes and minimize complications associated with this type of procedure.

CONCLUSION

This case highlights the importance of careful planning for routine tooth extractions, beginning with radiographic examination and, when abnormalities are detected, the necessity of advanced imaging such as computed tomography. This approach enables more accurate procedural planning, improving predictability and minimizing the risk of complications.

We can also conclude that the presence of large odontomas in areas of oroantral communication complicates surgical treatment, as removal of the odontoma is necessary and results in increased bone loss. Nevertheless, in the present case, the surgical technique employed was successful both in removing the lesion and in closing the oroantral communication after 24 months of follow-up.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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