

Odontogenic Cysts and Tumors

Clinicopathologic mechanisms • morphology • diagnostic reasoning

Dr Abu Suraih Sakhri

MBBS, MD (Pathology)

www.abusuraisakhri.com

Learning objectives

- Classify odontogenic cysts by tissue origin, position, and pathogenesis.
- Distinguish dentigerous, odontogenic keratocyst, and radicular cysts.
- Describe odontoma and ameloblastoma, including behavior and management.
- Use morphology and anatomic context to reason through illustrative cases.

Why the jaws contain epithelial-lined cysts

- Odontogenic epithelium leaves developmental remnants within the jaws.
- Many jaw cysts originate from these epithelial remnants.
- The rest of the skeleton does not show the same frequency of epithelial-lined cysts.

Shared odontogenic origin

The developmental source distinguishes odontogenic cysts from many other bone lesions.



A first diagnostic framework: Three locations

Tooth relationship constrains—but does not independently establish—the diagnosis.

At the crown

Associated with the crown of an unerupted tooth.

At the apex

Centered near a tooth root apex.

Without fixed tooth association

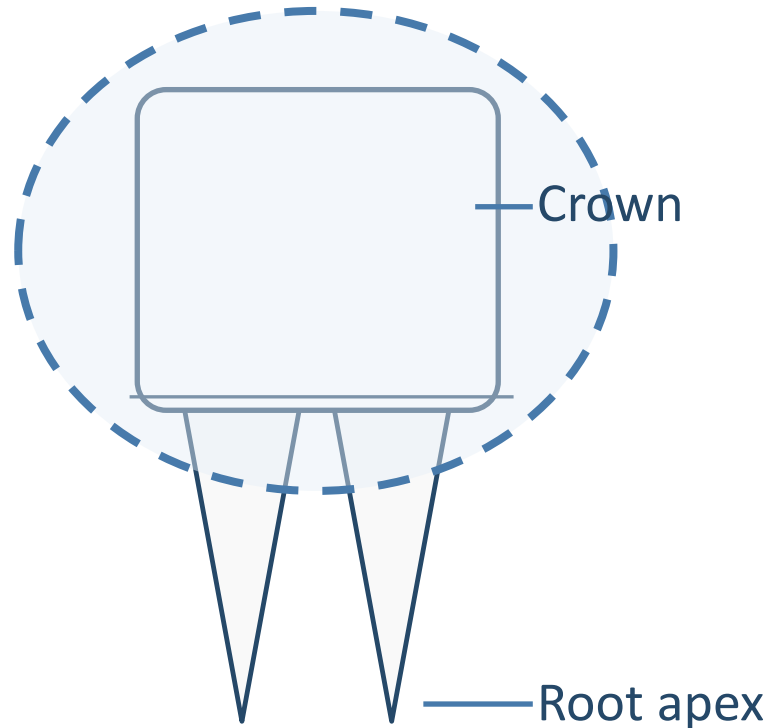
A jaw lucency not specifically linked to a particular tooth.

Crown-associated lesion: Anatomic question

Think dentigerous cyst.

Odontogenic keratocyst
may also appear here.

Ameloblastoma may enter
the differential.



Associated with the crown

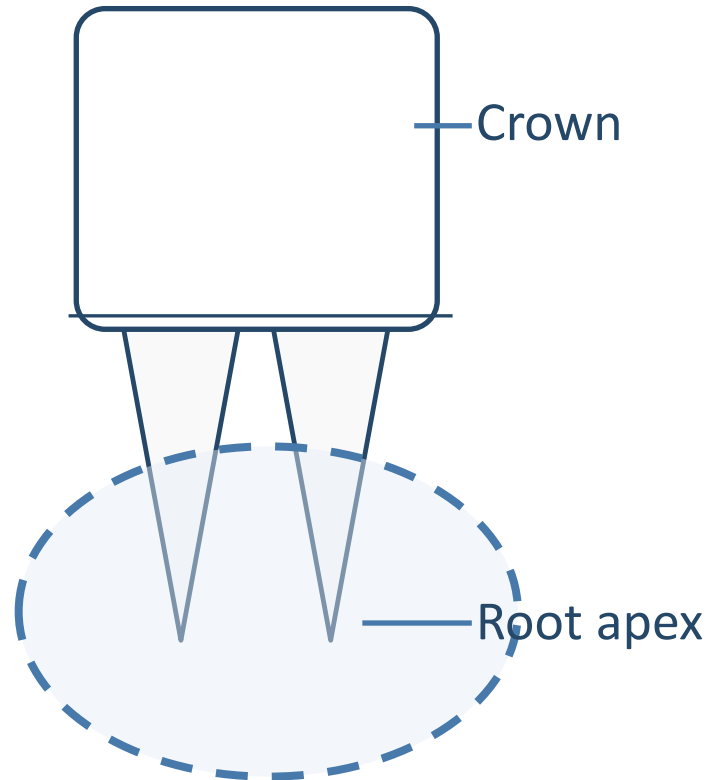
Simplified schematic — not a radiograph

Apical lesion: Anatomic question

Think radicular cyst in an inflamed tooth.

Periapical inflammatory tissue is relevant.

Odontogenic keratocyst may also involve this region.



Centered on the apex

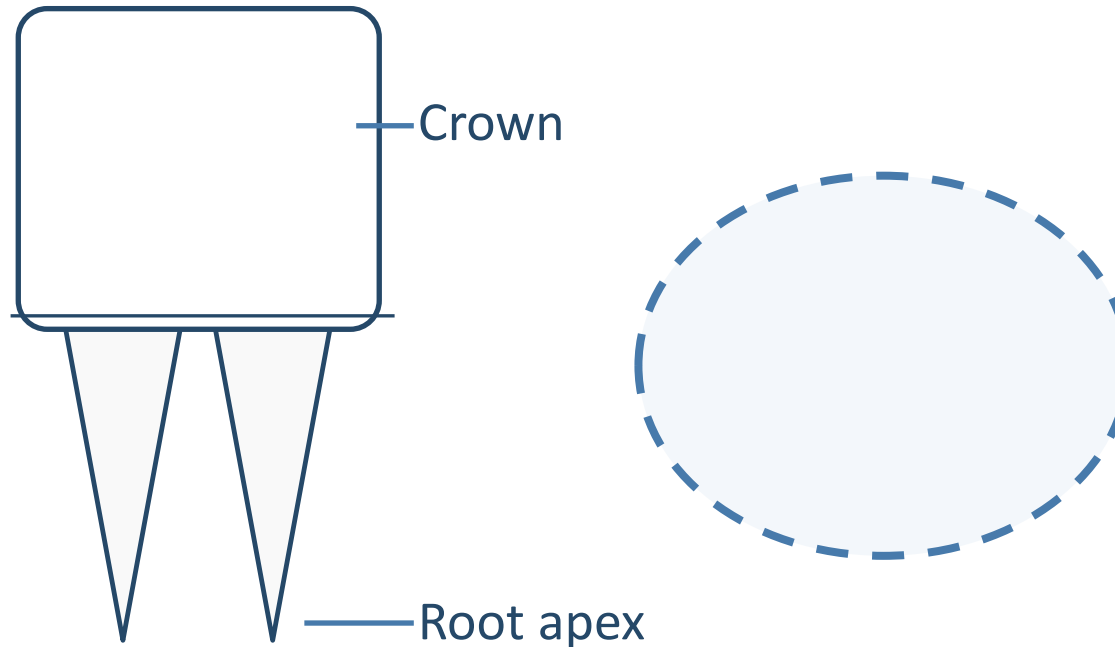
Simplified schematic — not a radiograph

Lesion not tied to one tooth

Odontogenic keratocyst remains a possibility.

Ameloblastoma is another consideration.

Anatomic location is only the initial clue.



No fixed tooth

Simplified schematic — not a radiograph

Two pathogenetic classes of cysts

The textbook groups odontogenic cysts as inflammatory or developmental.

Inflammatory

A longstanding inflammatory process initiates or sustains the cyst.

Developmental

The lesion derives from odontogenic developmental structures.

Inflammatory odontogenic cysts

Entity	Classification point
Radicular cyst	Periapical inflammatory cyst
Paradental (inflammatory collateral) cyst	Other inflammatory category listed in the source

Developmental odontogenic cysts

Entity	Entity
Dentigerous cyst	Odontogenic keratocyst
Gingival cyst	Lateral periodontal cyst
Glandular odontogenic cyst	Calcifying odontogenic cyst
Orthokeratinized odontogenic cyst	

Classification is not a diagnosis

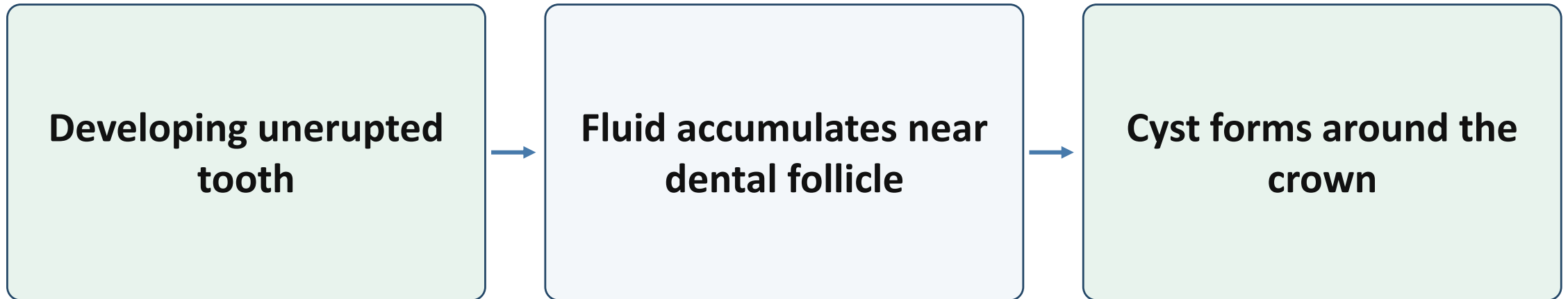
- Anatomic association helps select an initial differential.
- The cyst lining and its accompanying tissue reaction provide morphologic specificity.
- Behavior matters: Odontogenic keratocyst requires special clinical attention.
- The source provides detailed descriptions of three common cysts, not every listed subtype.

Dentigerous cyst: Defining feature

- A developmental cyst around the crown of an unerupted tooth.
- Fluid collects between the developing tooth and dental follicle.
- The crown relationship is the key anatomic discriminator.

Dentigerous cyst: Pathogenesis

This is a fluid-accumulation mechanism, not the pulp-inflammation route of a radicular cyst.



Impacted third molars: Common association

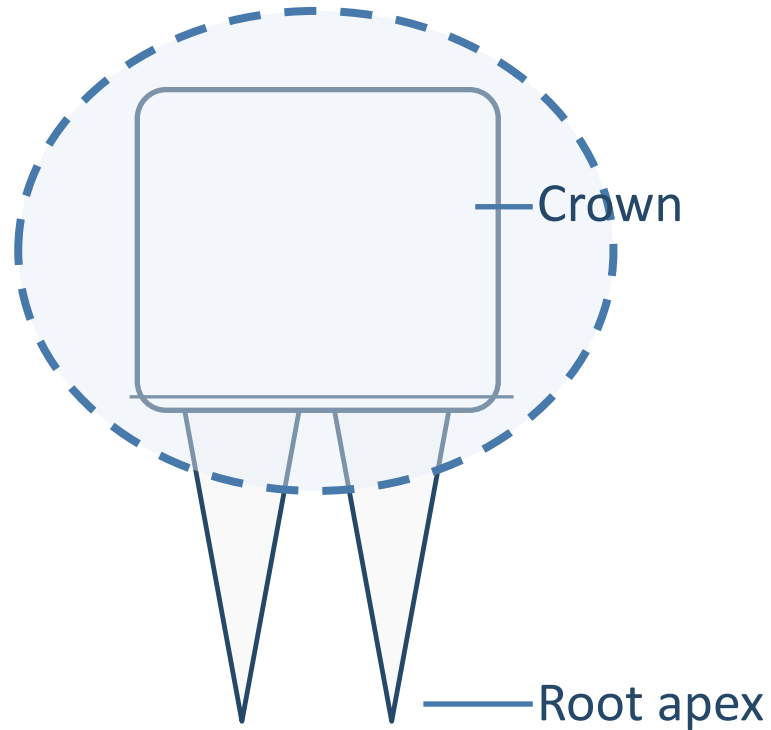
- Dentigerous cysts most often involve impacted third molars.
- The wisdom-tooth region is therefore a high-yield clinical setting.
- A cystic space around the unerupted crown fits the expected anatomical pattern.

Dentigerous cyst: Radiographic geometry

Unilocular radiolucency.

The radiolucency surrounds a tooth crown.

Frequent association with an impacted third molar.



Typical imaging pattern

Simplified schematic — not a radiograph

Dentigerous cyst: Epithelial lining

- The inner surface is lined by a thin stratified squamous epithelium.
- This microscopic lining confirms an epithelial cystic lesion.
- Tooth association is needed to interpret an otherwise relatively simple lining.

Dentigerous cyst: Lining and wall

Concurrent inflammation does not eliminate a developmental origin.

Lining

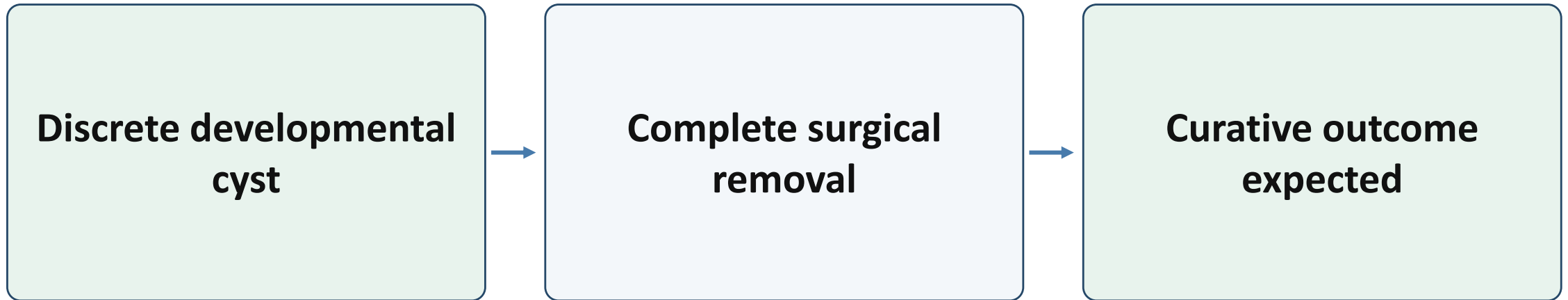
Thin stratified squamous epithelial layer.

Adjacent connective tissue

Dense chronic inflammatory infiltrate is often present.

Dentigerous cyst: Treatment logic

Complete excision as curative.



Schematic sequence

Dentigerous cyst: Integrated profile

Domain	Source-based recognition
Origin	Fluid near dental follicle
Location	Around crown of unerupted tooth
Imaging	Typically unilocular
Microscopy	Thin stratified squamous lining
Management	Complete excision is curative

Odontogenic keratocyst: Why it matters

- Developmental odontogenic cyst with locally aggressive behavior.
- May appear in several anatomic relationships to teeth.
- Microscopic keratinization and basal-cell architecture are characteristic.
- Complete removal is clinically important.

Odontogenic keratocyst: Age and sex

- Can occur at any age.
- Most common between ages 10 and 40 years.
- A male predominance is described.
- These tendencies are not individual diagnostic criteria.

Odontogenic keratocyst: Jaw distribution

- May occur anywhere in the maxilla or mandible.
- Do not restrict the differential to one jaw region.
- The relation to a specific tooth may vary.

Odontogenic keratocyst: Imaging patterns

Either radiographic pattern is compatible with the source description.

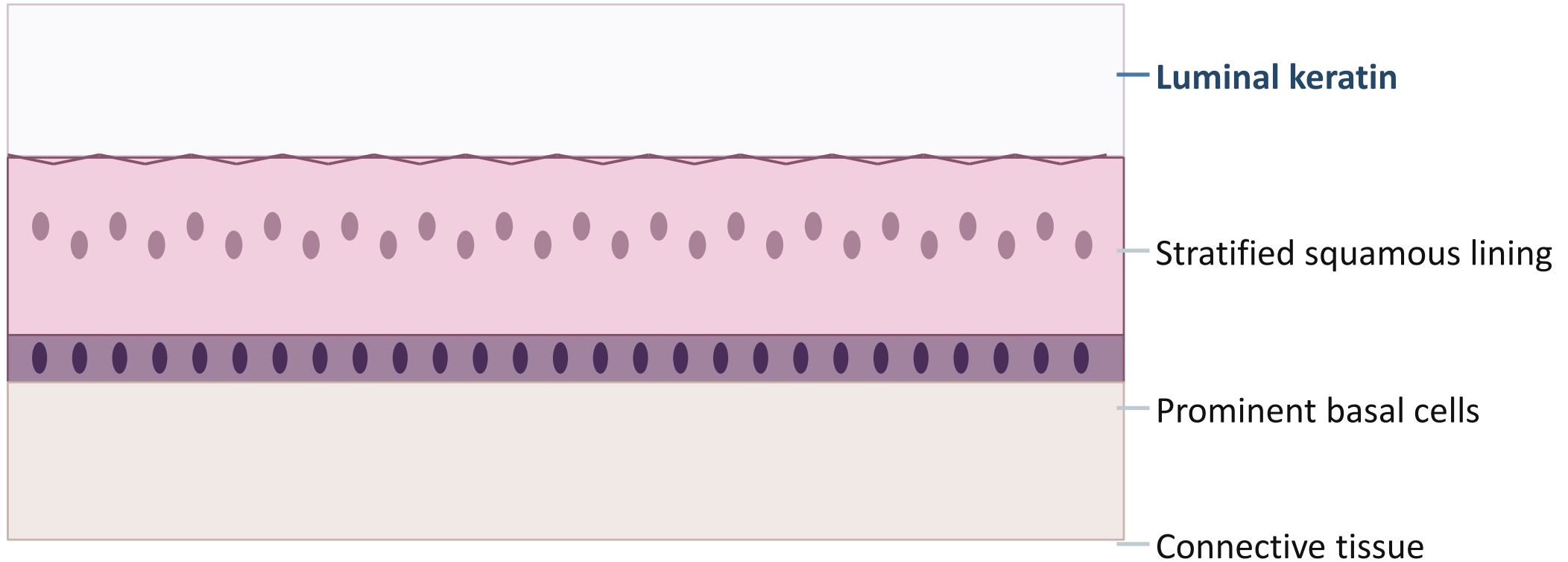
Unilocular

Well-defined radiolucent lesion with one apparent compartment.

Multilocular

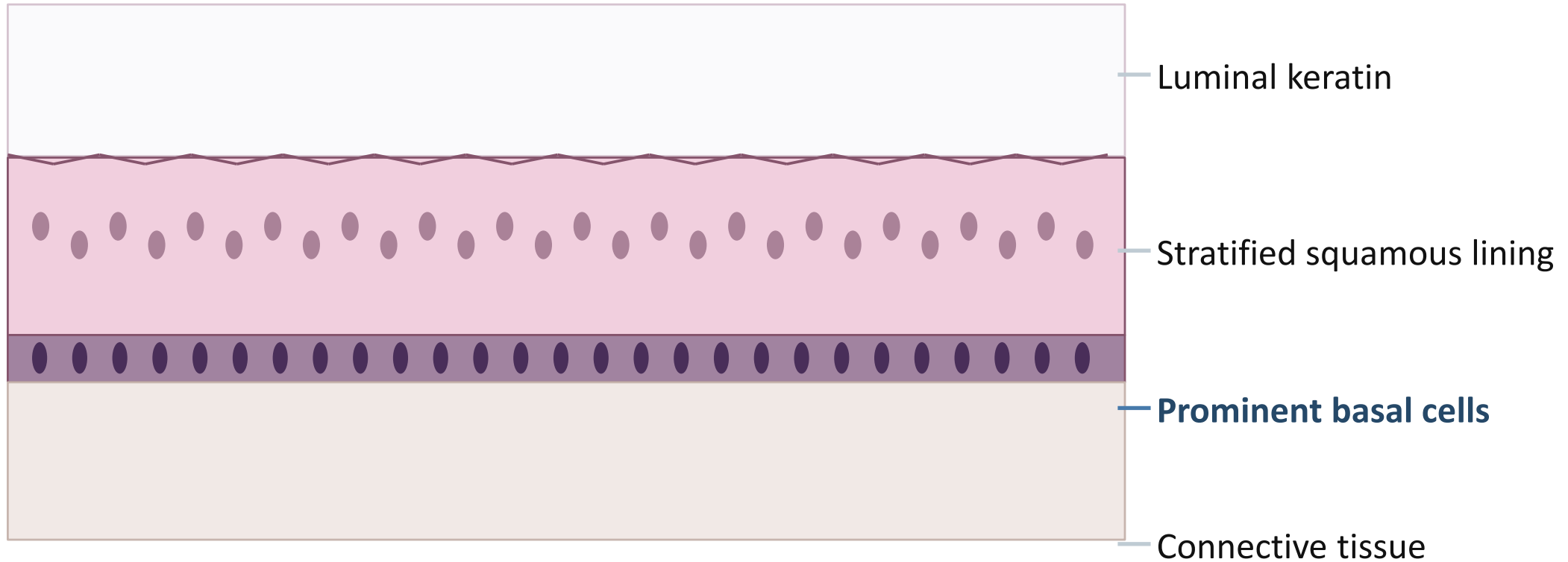
Well-defined radiolucency with multiple apparent compartments.

Odontogenic keratocyst: Keratinized lining



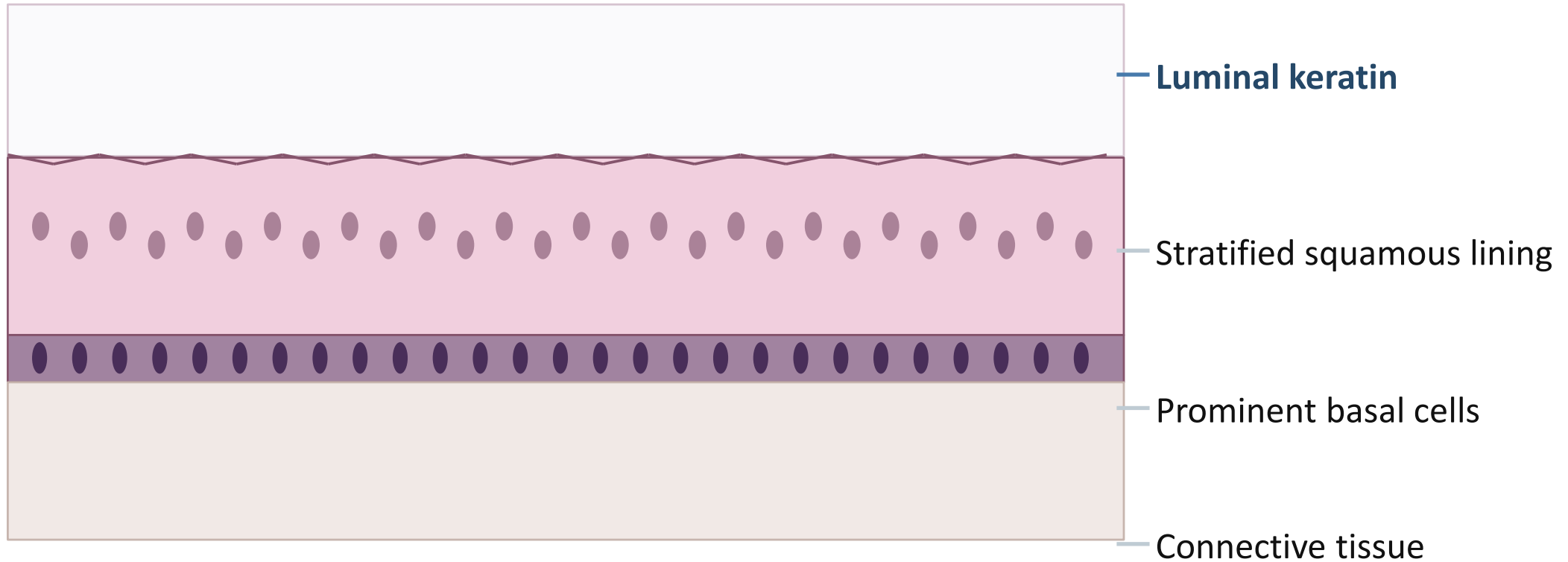
Schematic cellular architecture; Not a histologic section

Odontogenic keratocyst: Basal-cell prominence



Schematic cellular architecture; Not a histologic section

Odontogenic keratocyst: Corrugated surface



Schematic cellular architecture; Not a histologic section

Odontogenic keratocyst: Histologic triad

Feature	Interpretation
Thin lining	Keratinized stratified squamous epithelium
Basal region	Conspicuous basal-cell layer
Luminal contour	Corrugated epithelial surface

Why the odontogenic keratocyst differs

The diagnosis links architecture with clinical behavior.

Microscopic character

A distinctive keratinized, corrugated lining with prominent basal cells.

Clinical character

Locally aggressive course with significant risk of recurrence if inadequately removed.

Incomplete excision: Recurrence risk

- The cyst is locally aggressive and requires complete excision.
- The source reports recurrence up to 60% after inadequate removal.
- That number refers to inadequately removed lesions—not all treated cases.

Solitary versus multiple keratocysts

The number of lesions changes the next clinical question.

Solitary

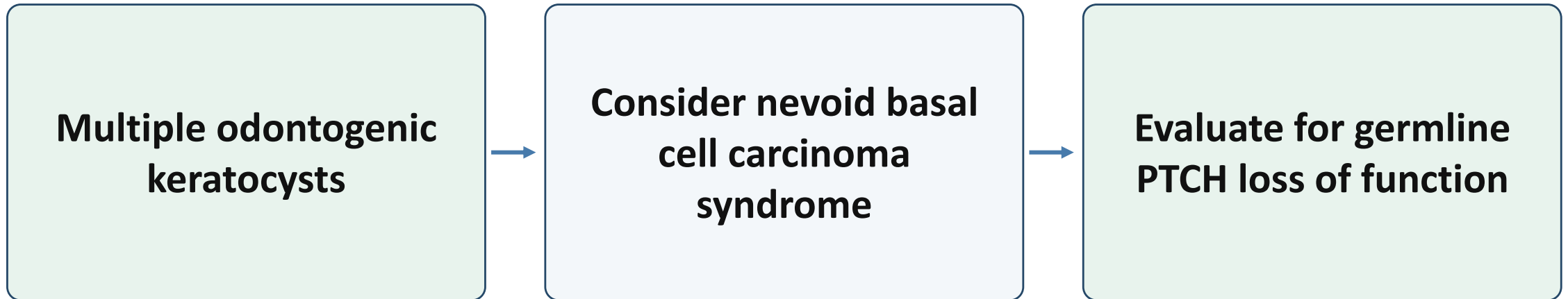
Approximately 80% of odontogenic keratocysts are solitary.

Multiple

Multiplicity raises concern for an inherited tumor-predisposition syndrome.

Multiple keratocysts and Gorlin syndrome

The source identifies Gorlin syndrome as the relevant syndromic association.



PTCH: A syndrome-associated tumor suppressor

- Gorlin syndrome involves germline loss-of-function mutations of PTCH.
- PTCH is identified in the source as a tumor suppressor gene.
- This molecular association supports evaluation when odontogenic keratocysts are multiple.

Odontogenic keratocyst vs dentigerous cyst

Criterion	Dentigerous cyst	Odontogenic keratocyst
Typical location	Unerupted tooth crown	Any jaw region
Radiology	Unilocular	Unilocular or multilocular
Lining	Thin squamous	Thin keratinized squamous
Distinctive clue	Dental follicle association	Corrugation and basal layer
Treatment concern	Excision curative	Aggressive / may recur

Odontogenic keratocyst: Diagnostic synthesis

- Combine jaw radiolucency with epithelial architecture.
- Look for keratinized stratified epithelium, a prominent basal layer, and a corrugated luminal surface.
- Integrate recurrence risk and lesion multiplicity into the clinical assessment.

Radicular cyst: Inflammatory origin

- A common inflammatory cyst at a tooth root apex.
- Its development follows longstanding pulpitis.
- Advanced dental caries or local trauma can initiate the pulpal injury.

Two routes into chronic pulp inflammation

The pathway to the apical inflammatory lesion starts within the affected tooth.

Advanced caries

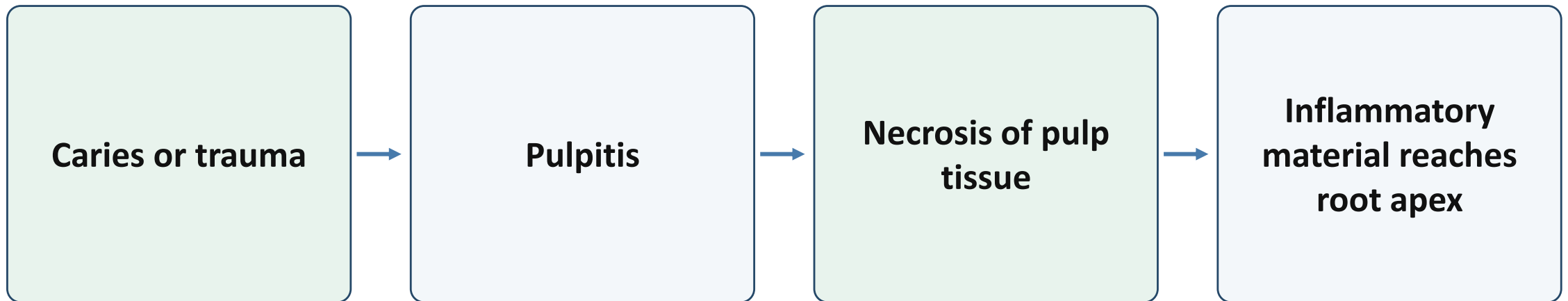
Dental decay can produce prolonged pulpal inflammation.

Local trauma

Injury can also provoke pulpitis and later necrosis.

Radicular cyst: From injury to apical bone

The necrotic pulp-related process can extend through the root to adjacent alveolar bone.

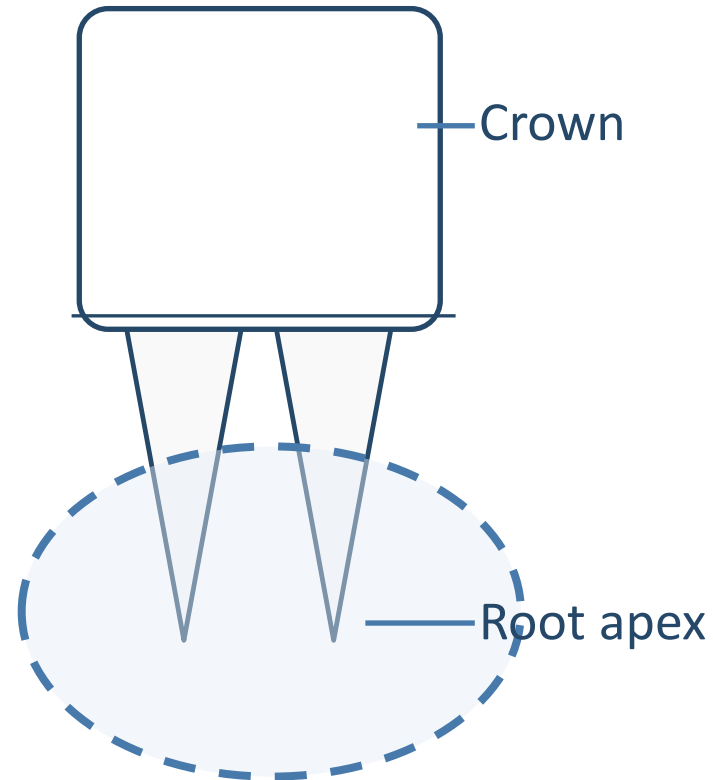


Radicular cyst: Apical localization

Inflammation centered at the tooth apex.

The source associates the process with damaged pulp.

A tooth-centered history helps identify the inflammatory origin.

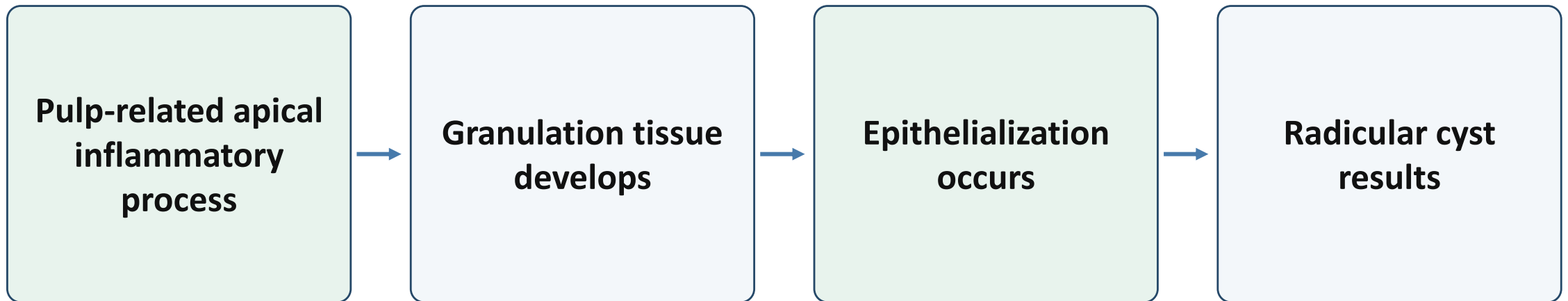


Apical inflammatory lesion

Simplified schematic — not a radiograph

From periapical inflammation to epithelial cyst

The cyst is an epithelialized consequence of chronic periapical inflammation.



Periapical granuloma: Terminology caveat

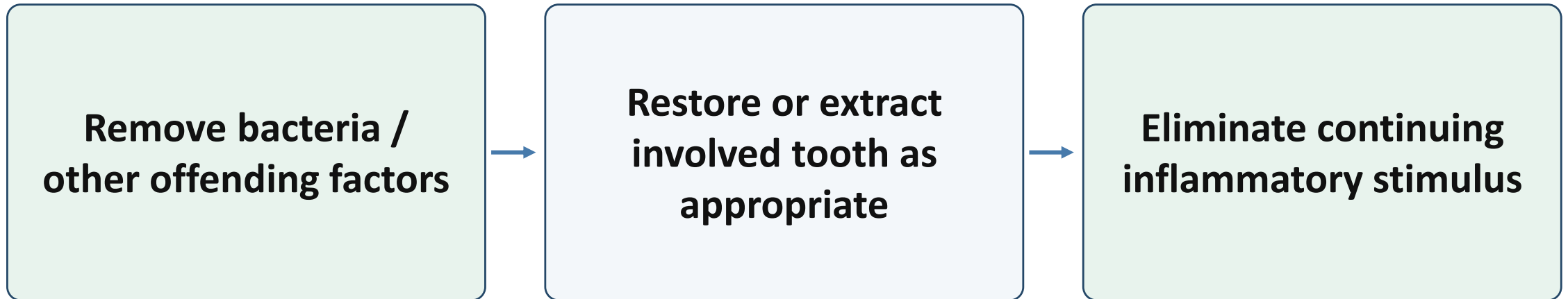
- “Periapical granuloma” remains a commonly used historical term.
- Despite that label, the lesion is not true granulomatous inflammation.
- The terminology should not be read as evidence of granuloma-forming pathology.

Why periapical lesions persist

- Bacteria or other local irritants can remain in the affected site.
- Continuing irritants maintain the inflammatory response.
- Without eliminating the cause, treating the cyst alone may fail to address the mechanism.

Radicular cyst: Therapeutic principle

Removing the irritant and addressing the diseased tooth.



Radicular cyst: Integrated profile

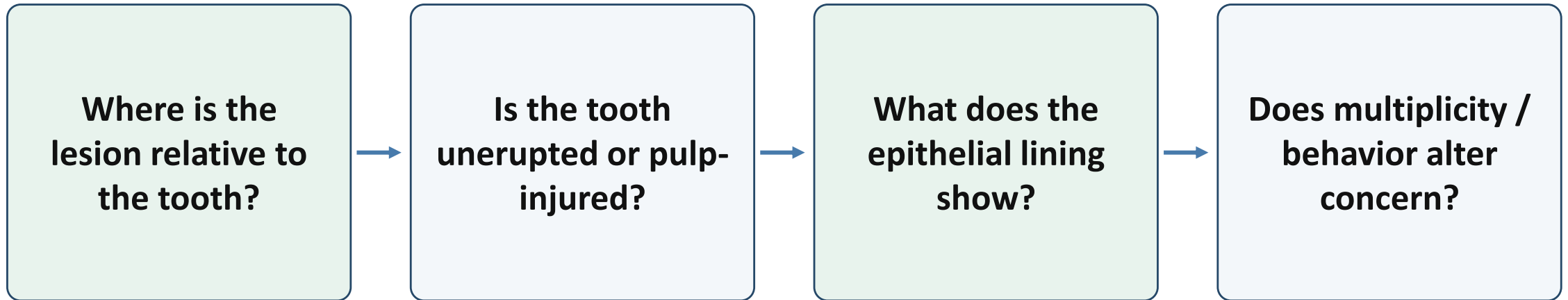
Domain	Key point
Cause	Longstanding pulpitis; often caries or trauma
Site	Root apex
Mechanism	Pulp necrosis → apical inflammation → granulation → epithelialization
Persistence	Remaining bacteria or irritants
Treatment	Remove cause; tooth restoration or extraction

Three cysts: Differentiate origin and site

Cyst	Origin	Anatomic clue	Discriminating observation
Dentigerous	Developmental	Unerrupted crown	Simple thin squamous lining
Keratocyst	Developmental	Variable jaw site	Keratinization + corrugation + basal layer
Radicular	Inflammatory	Root apex	Pulpitis, necrosis, chronic apical process

Reasoning from radiolucency to differential

Location guides; Morphology and clinical context refine.



Schematic sequence

Why radiographic position is not sufficient

- A crown-associated lucency may represent more than one odontogenic lesion.
- Odontogenic keratocyst can present in multiple anatomic settings.
- Radiographic pattern must be integrated with histologic and clinical information.

Odontogenic tumors: Biological diversity

- Odontogenic tumors encompass different histologic patterns and behaviors.
- Some lesions are true benign or malignant neoplasms.
- Others are probably hamartomatous rather than autonomous neoplasms.
- The defining tissues may be epithelial, mesenchymal, or mixed.

Three tissue-origin groups

Tissue origin organizes the textbook classification.

Epithelial

Tumors of odontogenic epithelium.

Mesenchymal

Tumors of odontogenic mesenchyme.

Mixed

Tumors containing odontogenic epithelial and mesenchymal components.

Epithelial odontogenic tumors: Benign

Entity	Classification
Adenomatoid odontogenic tumor	Benign epithelial
Squamous odontogenic tumor	Benign epithelial
Calcifying epithelial odontogenic tumor	Benign epithelial
Ameloblastoma (conventional, unicystic, extraosseous)	Benign epithelial
Adenoid ameloblastoma	Benign epithelial

Epithelial odontogenic tumors: Malignant

Entity	Classification
Ameloblastic carcinoma	Malignant epithelial
Sclerosing odontogenic carcinoma	Malignant epithelial
Clear-cell odontogenic carcinoma	Malignant epithelial
Ghost cell odontogenic carcinoma	Malignant epithelial
Primary intraosseous squamous cell carcinoma	Malignant epithelial

Benign mesenchymal odontogenic tumors

Entity	Tissue classification
Odontogenic fibroma	Mesenchymal
Odontogenic myxoma	Mesenchymal
Cementoblastoma	Mesenchymal
Cemento-ossifying fibroma	Mesenchymal

Mixed odontogenic tumors: Classification

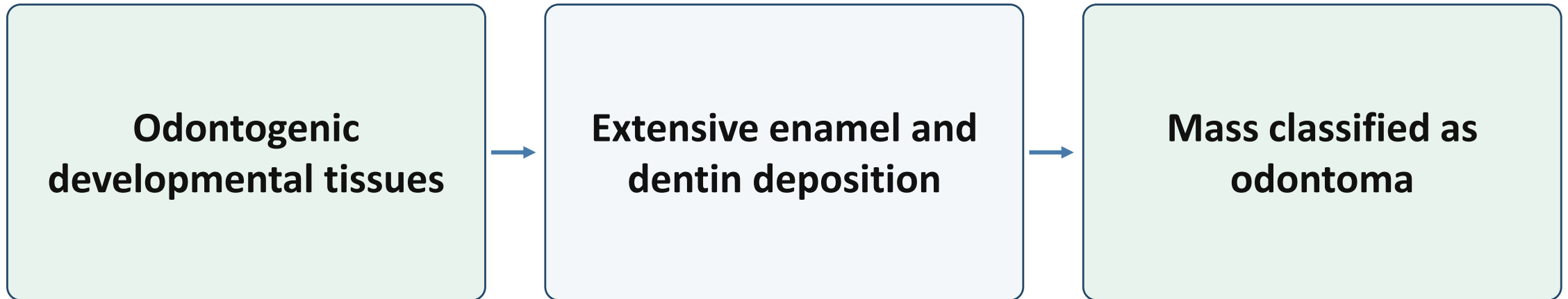
Benign mixed lesions	Malignant mixed lesions
Odontoma — compound type	Ameloblastic fibrosarcoma
Odontoma — complex type	Odontogenic carcinosarcoma
Ameloblastic fibroma	
Ameloblastic fibro-odontoma	
Dentinogenic ghost cell tumor	

Odontoma: Commonest odontogenic tumor

- Odontoma is the most common odontogenic tumor.
- It is listed among lesions containing both odontogenic epithelium and mesenchyme.
- The deposition of dental hard tissues.

Odontoma: Tissue production

Compound and complex forms appear in the source classification.



Schematic sequence

Odontoma: A hamartomatous interpretation

The distinction explains its generally limited clinical behavior in this source.

Biology

Probably represents a hamartoma rather than a true neoplasm.

Therapy

Local excision is curative.

Ameloblastoma: Epithelial odontogenic tumor

- Arises from odontogenic epithelium.
- Does not display ectomesenchymal differentiation.
- The tumor can be cystic and grows slowly, yet invades locally.

Ectomesenchyme: Why absence matters

Histogenesis separates ameloblastoma from mixed odontogenic tumors.

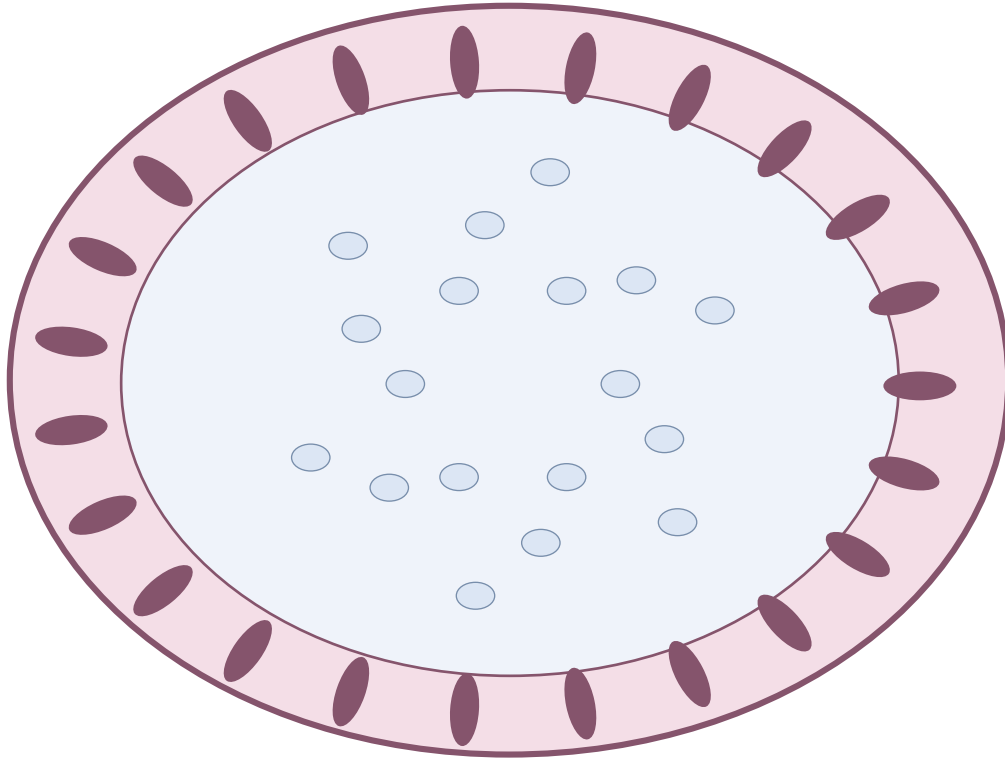
Ectomesenchyme

Neural crest–derived cells contribute to major dental structures.

Ameloblastoma

Predominantly odontogenic epithelial tumor without ectomesenchymal differentiation.

Ameloblastoma: Peripheral columnar cells



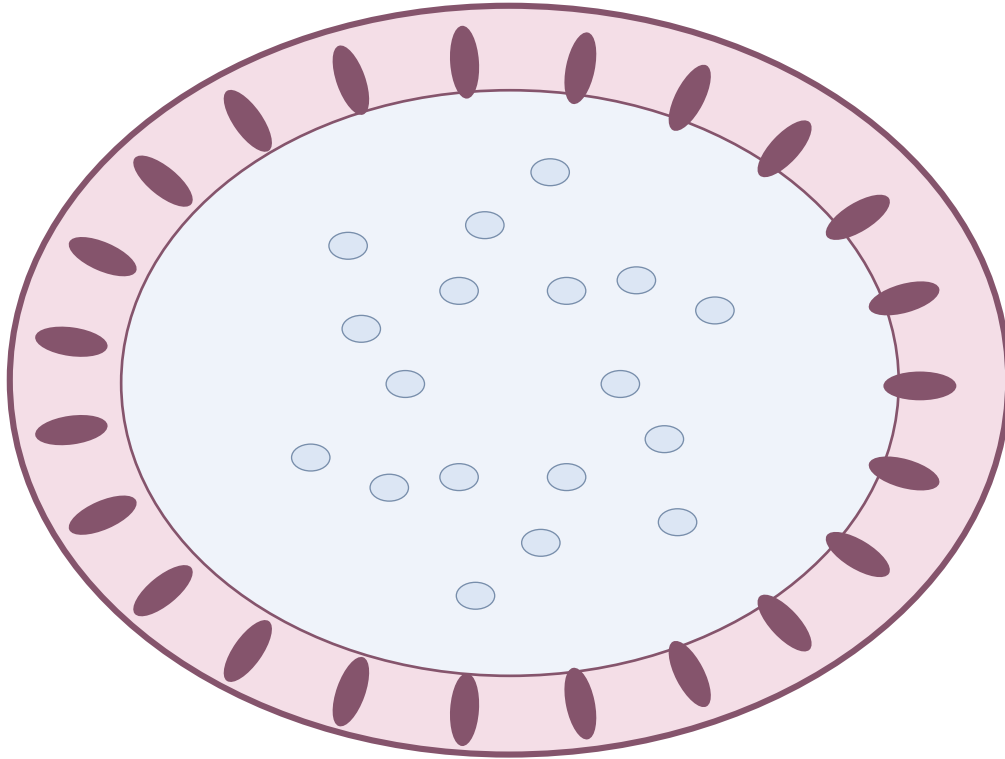
Peripheral columnar cell layer

Reverse nuclear polarization

Central stellate-reticulum-like cells

Simplified schematic; Not an H&E photomicrograph

Ameloblastoma: Reverse nuclear polarity



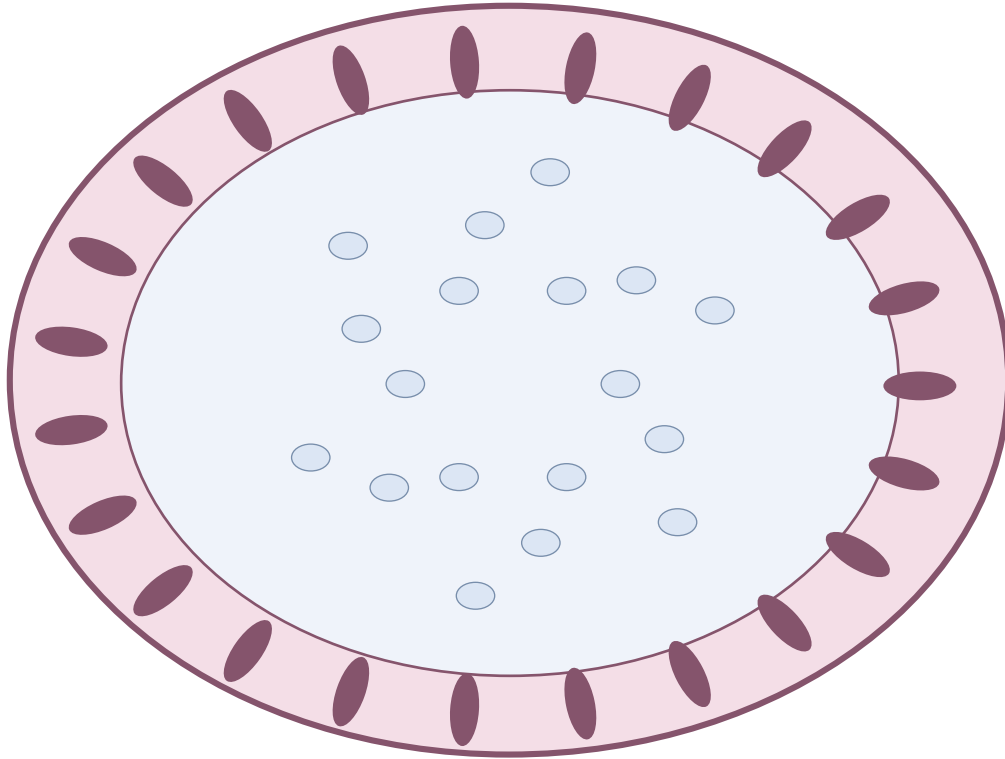
Peripheral columnar cell layer

Reverse nuclear polarization

Central stellate-reticulum-like cells

Simplified schematic; Not an H&E photomicrograph

Ameloblastoma: Stellate-reticulum-like center



Peripheral columnar cell layer

Reverse nuclear polarization

Central stellate-reticulum-like cells

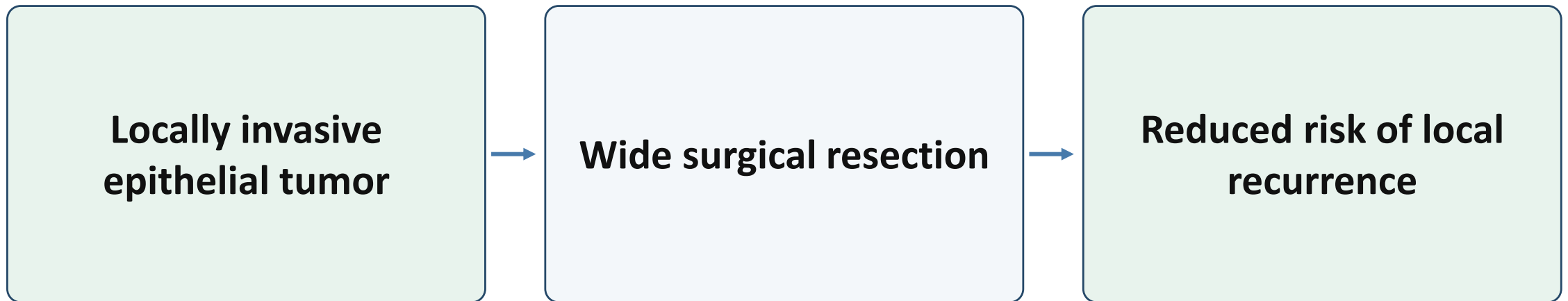
Simplified schematic; Not an H&E photomicrograph

Ameloblastoma: Indolent growth, invasive edge

- The usual clinical course is relatively indolent.
- Slow progression does not imply a noninvasive growth pattern.
- The lesion can extend locally within jaw tissues.

Ameloblastoma: Treatment follows behavior

The textbook specifically recommends wide resection to prevent recurrence.



Odontoma and ameloblastoma are not equivalents

Feature	Odontoma	Ameloblastoma
Dominant character	Hard-tissue formation	Epithelial tumor
Tissues	Enamel and dentin deposition	No ectomesenchymal differentiation
Behavior	Likely hamartomatous	Locally invasive
Recommended operation	Local excision	Wide resection

Case: Crown-associated radiolucency

An impacted third molar is surrounded by a well-defined, single-compartment radiolucency.

Which cyst best fits the tooth relationship?

Dentigerous cyst is a leading consideration.

Defining clue: Lesion encircles the crown of an unerupted tooth.

Case: Chronic pulpal injury

After longstanding dental caries and pulpitis, an inflammatory lesion is centered at the root apex.

Which pathway does Robbins describe?

Radicular (periapical) cyst formation.

Pulp necrosis and apical inflammation can progress through granulation to epithelialization.

Case: Multiple jaw keratocysts

Several jaw cysts show corrugated keratinized lining and a prominent basal cell layer.

What additional evaluation is indicated?

Evaluate for Gorlin (nevoid basal cell carcinoma) syndrome.

Multiple odontogenic keratocysts suggest a PTCH-associated inherited condition.

Case: Slow-growing but infiltrative tumor

A jaw tumor of odontogenic epithelium has peripheral palisading, reverse polarization, and a central loose cellular area.

Which tumor and operative implication fit best?

Ameloblastoma; Wide surgical resection is advised.

Locally invasive biology—not rapid growth—is the central treatment determinant.

Five clinicopathologic anchors

Integrate lesion position, tissue derivation, morphology, and biologic behavior.

Dentigerous cyst

Unrupted crown; Fluid by follicle; Excision curative.

Odontogenic keratocyst

Corrugated keratinized lining; Recurrence and syndromic implications.

Radicular cyst

Necrotic/inflamed pulp; Apex; Remove the cause.

Odontoma

Enamel and dentin; Likely hamartoma; Local excision.

Ameloblastoma

Locally invasive epithelial tumor; Wide resection.

References and source boundaries

Primary text

Robbins, Cotran & Kumar: Pathologic Basis of Disease. 11th edition (2026).

Head and Neck — Odontogenic Cysts and Tumors, pp. 670–671; Fig. 16.8–16.9; Tables 16.3–16.4.

Scope note

Teaching diagrams are original simplified vector schematics; they are not clinical images or histologic specimens. No supplementary diagnostic criteria or external classification updates were incorporated.