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Wisdom Teeth
Patient Information

About Your Wisdom Teeth



What You Need to Know

Also known as “third molars”, wisdom teeth don’t usually push through the gums until individuals reach their late teens, early 20’s or sometimes even older. Wisdom teeth are usually the last teeth to push through the gums.

Most individuals have four wisdom teeth while some individuals have none. For many, there is not enough space at the rear of the jaw for wisdom teeth to easily push through the gums. When the jaw lacks space for the wisdom tooth to push through, the tooth becomes “impacted” or wedged in.

Impacted wisdom teeth may not necessarily be a problem for some people while others may experience severe problems. If any wisdom teeth cause problems, they must be removed as soon as possible before the situation worsens.

Sometimes, if it appears that the wisdom teeth will be difficult to remove, your dentist may refer you to an oral and maxillofacial surgeon. Depending on the shape and position of some wisdom teeth and the shape of the jaws, it’s occasionally recommendable that an oral and maxillofacial surgeon removes the wisdom teeth.

When to Remove Teeth

Your dentist will need to inspect your mouth, jaws and x-rays before discussing the diagnosis with you. It may be required that one or more of your wisdom teeth are removed, or other options are needed to be discussed.

If there has been an infection, it may need to be treated before the surgery is performed.

Sometimes, even if the wisdom tooth has caused problems, the situation may remedy once it has pushed through the gum. Your dentist may delay surgery to see if it is no longer causing problems.

Some impacted wisdom teeth never cause problems, while others can be quite problematic and need urgent removal.

The decision to remove your wisdom teeth is yours.



About Your Wisdom Teeth



Talk To Your Dentist

This brochure provides general information only about wisdom teeth and is not a substitute for advice from your dentist. Not all facts and information about wisdom teeth are provided in this document. This brochure should only be given after consultation with your dentist.

Talk to your dentist about all the benefits and risks of wisdom teeth removal.

Your dentist will be happy to answer any questions pertaining to your diagnosis, teeth, surgery and anaesthesia.

Please read this brochure carefully. Some terminology in this brochure may need further explanation by a dentist so talk to him or her about this at your next appointment.

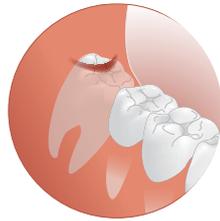
Your dentist can not give a guarantee that treatment will meet all your expectations and has no risk. If you are unsure about the advice you have received, seek a second opinion from another dentist or an oral and maxillofacial surgeon.

Consent form: Your dentist may ask you to sign a consent form if you decide to have your wisdom teeth removed. Please read it carefully and if you have any questions, ask a dentist for more information.

Impacted Wisdom Teeth Potential Problems

Crowding

Wisdom teeth may push neighbouring teeth out of correct alignment.



Pain

The wisdom tooth may put pressure on the tooth next to it, causing pain. Infection around the wisdom tooth may also cause pain.

Infection

An infection can start at the top of an impacted wisdom tooth when it starts to push through the gum.



Inflammation and infection can cause swelling, pain and jaw stiffness. It can also cause bad breath and an unpleasant taste. The individual may feel quite unwell and even have difficulty swallowing.

Cyst

If not removed, a wisdom tooth may cause a sack of fluid to form (cyst) around the tooth and may displace the tooth. This can destroy bone and damage the gums and other teeth. Cysts are fairly common around unerupted wisdom teeth.

Treatment of Infection

Infections may be treated in several ways. Your dentist may clean the infected area around the tooth. You may be advised to rinse your mouth with a solution of one teaspoon of salt and a glass of warm water. The water should be as warm as possible, but not uncomfortably hot.

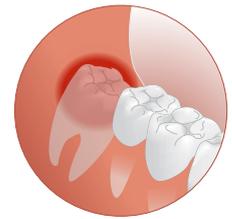
You may be prescribed disinfectant mouthwash and pain relief. Your dentist may prescribe antibiotics.

Food Trap

Food may become trapped between the wisdom teeth and the neighbouring molar. Consequently, cavities can occur in both teeth.

Ulcer

Upper wisdom teeth may sometimes push sideways out of the gum. This may cause an ulcer where the tooth rubs against the inside of the cheek.



Resorption Cavity

Sometimes impacted wisdom teeth may continue to push against the molar next to it. This causes a resorption cavity where the wisdom tooth nudges against the molar. Often, this can result in serious damage to both teeth.

The molars may become abscessed or infected. When infection occurs, removal of both molars is usually required. Resorption cavities are rare.

Impacted Wisdom Teeth Potential Problems



Treatment of Infection

If lower wisdom teeth are infected, upper wisdom teeth biting down on the gums can exacerbate the condition. Removal of the upper wisdom teeth can help remedy the situation.

Medical & Dental History

Your complete medical and dental history must be disclosed to your dentist. This ensures the best possible treatment.

Certain health conditions can interfere with surgery, anaesthesia and after-care, so it's vital to disclose all information. The dentist may recommend particular health tests or blood test.

Medicines

Tell your dentist about all medications you are currently taking or have taken previously. This includes contraception and even over-the-counter medicines, e.g. cough medicines and aspirin. It is essential that you tell your dentist if you have ever had an allergic reaction to antibiotics or any medications.

Bleeding or Blood Disorders

Inform your dentist if you:

- Have any blood disorders, e.g. *haemophilia*;
- Profusely bleed when injured or have surgery;
- Take any blood thinners e.g. *warfarin* or *aspirin*.

Pregnancy

Ensure that you tell your dentist if you may be pregnant. Pregnancy could affect treatments, including:

- Pain relief;
- Anaesthesia;
- Date of surgery (delay may be necessary).

Dental x-ray films are safe for pregnant women providing x-ray beams are pointed at the uterus.

Surgery Procedures

Smoking: Do not smoke for the two weeks before your surgery. Smoking increases the risk of post-operative infection and impairs healing.

X-Ray Examination

Your dentist will take an x-ray film of your jaw. The x-ray will aid your dentist to plan the most appropriate removal of your wisdom tooth.

Surgery Location

Depending on your condition, your dentist will advise whether surgery should be performed in the dental surgery, a day surgery clinic or a hospital.



Anaesthesia

After you have had a discussion with your dentist, where pros and cons of local and general anaesthesia are discussed, you will come to a decision on what form of anaesthesia is best for you.

Local Anaesthesia

If it is anticipated that surgery will be fairly straightforward, your dentist may suggest providing local anaesthetic via injection. This will numb the gums and lower part of the face.

Local Anaesthesia

If it is anticipated that surgery will be fairly straightforward, your dentist may suggest providing local anaesthetic via injection. This will numb the gums and lower part of the face. Additionally, your dentist may give you some medication to relax you. The dentist will then extract the wisdom tooth.

General anaesthesia: The dentist may recommend general anaesthesia for some people, which means you would be totally unconscious for the procedure. **General anaesthesia** requires a specialist anaesthetist and may be used for people who:

- Have wisdom teeth that may be difficult to remove;
- Require multiple teeth to be removed;
- Have additional problems with their teeth, gums or jaw;
- Prefer to not remain awake during the procedure.



Removal of Wisdom Teeth

Your dentist will have to make an incision to open your gums to remove the wisdom tooth. Sometimes, a small portion of the bone may also have to be removed in order for the dentist to get to the wisdom tooth.

Your tooth may be divided into segments to make removal safer and easier.

Afterwards, the incision in your gum may require stitches.

Your dentist may use stitches that dissolve over a few days or stitches that need to be removed several days later by your dentist.

NOTE:

Do not eat or drink anything for six hours before surgery under general anaesthetic. If surgery is being performed in the morning, do not eat or drink after midnight the night before.

Talk to your dentist or anaesthetist for full instructions. Occasionally, some people have serious reactions to general anaesthesia. However, modern anaesthesia is safe with few risk. Tell your dentist or anaesthetist if you have ever had a reaction to an anaesthetic drug.

Surgery

Recovery & Care



If wisdom tooth extraction is performed in the chair, you'll be required to rest after the surgery before returning home. Your dentist will periodically check on you while you recover.

Organise a family member or friend to drive you home as you are not permitted to drive after surgery.

Once your dentist is happy with your recovery, you may return home.

If your procedure is performed under general anaesthesia in a hospital, you will have to stay in your room until you have recovered fully from the anaesthetic.

Self-care

Take time off school or work for several days to rest at home after surgery.

- Do not exercise, drive or operate heavy machinery;
- Eat soft foods only such as pureed meat and vegetables, soups and jelly for the first two days;
- Stay hydrated;
- Apply ice packs to the area to reduce swelling and pain;
- Do not drink alcohol while taking painkillers or antibiotics;

Post-Surgery Pain Relief

The amount of pain people feel after surgery varies. Appropriate pain relief will be given to you by your dentist.

If you feel that you require more pain relief or are unsure about your medication, contact your dentist. After the second day, pain usually starts to decrease. However, people may require pain medication for up to one week.

If you feel that your pain is not diminishing as the days pass, speak to your dentist. You may require further pain relief.

Control of Bleeding

By biting gently but firmly onto a piece of gauze, you can help stop the bleeding. This is because pressure helps form blood clots. Leave the area undisturbed so as to not start bleeding again. Be aware that gums may lose some blood for a day or so after surgery.

By the second day, all bleeding should have stopped. If bleeding continues, consult your dentist immediately

Surgery

Recovery & Care



Swelling

Swelling almost always occurs after surgery. The amount of swelling varies between individuals. Some have little inflammation while others suffer from excessive inflammation. Most swelling will go down within four to five days. Applying ice packs on the jaw area will help alleviate the swelling.

Follow-up Appointment

It's important to attend your follow-up appointment as your dentist will need to check on the healing of your gums and possibly take out any undesirable stitches.

Surgery

Potential Complications



No surgical procedure is risk-free. Your dentist will spend time with you going through a list of complications and potential side effects, but this may not cover every complication that may occur. However, before deciding on surgery, it's essential that you have enough information to weigh up the pros and cons of wisdom tooth surgery.

The majority of patients have no complications after surgery, but if you have any concerns you should discuss them with your dentist. Usual side-effects after wisdom tooth surgery involve swelling, pain and limited jaw function for a few days after surgery.

The following list of possible complications is here to inform you, not to alarm you. However, it is not a comprehensive list of all complications that may occur.

Nerve Damage Causing Pain

In rare cases, some injured nerves may not heal well, and pain may persist or recur without diminishing. This unlikely event can happen despite when all care was taken to avoid injuring the major nerves and surgery has been successful. It is still not understood why nerves react this way. In these instances, pain may be difficult to treat.

Numbness or Different Sensation

There are several nerves that sit close to the wisdom tooth, such as the inferior alveolar nerve or lingual nerve. Occasionally an impacted wisdom tooth may be touching one of these nerves. When a wisdom tooth is removed, the procedure may bruise the nerve, leaving a feeling of tingling, numbness or loss of feeling in the teeth, lips, gums, chin, cheeks, tongue and around the lower and upper jaw.

Injured nerves usually heal, and as healing takes place, the numbness and tingling will disappear. This may take from four to eight weeks. Occasionally, some individuals report six to 18 months before complete healing of the nerve has occurred. In rare cases, the nerve may not heal completely, and altered sensation or numbness may be permanent.

After removal of the wisdom tooth, a blood clot will form over the bone. This is essential for healing and relief of pain. However, if the clot is washed away or dissolved, it leaves the bone exposed. This is known as a "dry socket". This can result in a throbbing pain that may last several days. If you are suffering from pain like this, contact your dentist immediately. You can prevent a dry socket by doing the following:

- Rinse your mouth VERY GENTLY with a warm salt water solution to wash away the blood. Never rinse vigorously or spit with force as this may loosen the clot and slow healing. Rinse every four hours or more often. Rinsing helps healing, reducing swelling and pain and reduces the risk of infection.
- Avoid smoking, as smoking interferes with healing.

Surgery

Potential Complications



- For 24 hours after surgery, do not brush your teeth around the area of surgery. For the next few days, brush extremely gently.

Difficulty Opening the Mouth

It is common to have discomfort or pain when opening the mouth after wisdom tooth extraction. This problem usually subsides a few days after surgery, once the swelling goes away.

Fever

After surgery, your body temperature may be slightly higher. This should return to normal after 12 to 24 hours.

Any fever that lasts longer than 24 hours may indicate an infection or other problem. Consult your dentist immediately if you have a fever lasting more than a day.

Infection

Infections of either the bone or gum are mostly treated with an antibiotic. If you ever had an allergic reaction to an antibiotic or another drug you must inform your dentist. Make sure you complete your course of antibiotics.

Excessive Bleeding

Excessive bleeding (haemorrhaging) is rare, although it may occur. This can be caused by vomiting or too much exertion after surgery. Place a piece of gauze over the wound and apply gentle but firm pressure on the gauze for 15 minutes. If bleeding continues, consult your dentist immediately.

Lip Sores

During the surgical procedure, pressure or stretching of the lip by the surgical instruments may cause bruising or even small sores. Usually, they heal quickly without any problem. Lip sores are not common.

Weak Jaw

Occasionally, wisdom tooth extraction may temporarily weaken the jawbone. Rarely, fractures or breakages may occur.

Surgery

Potential Complications



Sinus Problems

With upper wisdom teeth, the roots sit close to the sinuses. Occasionally, when a wisdom tooth is removed, a sinus may be opened. Usually, it will heal quickly without infection. However, if there are any signs of infection or other problems, contact your dentist as more treatment may be required.

Vomiting

Some individuals vomit while recovering from general anaesthetic.

Damage to a Nearby Tooth or Fillings

Rarely, when a wisdom tooth is extracted, the tooth or filling next to the wisdom tooth may become chipped or loosened.

Your Treatment Costs

Your dentist will give an estimate of all costs for treatment. The cost will vary, depending on the number of teeth extracted and the extent of treatment required. If more treatments become necessary, this will alter the initial cost and make the final cost different from what was initially proposed. Make sure you discuss the cost at length with your dentist before your procedure.

**Call your nearest
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