



44 Dental Care

Removal of impacted wisdom teeth – answering your questions

This leaflet aims to help you understand your treatment and contains answers to many of the commonly asked questions about wisdom teeth. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation, please ask the oral surgeon at your appointment.

The problem

The wisdom tooth (or third molar) is usually the last tooth to erupt into the mouth any time after 16 years of age. Often there is not enough space for wisdom teeth and so they don't grow into the mouth normally. When this happens, the wisdom teeth are said to be "impacted". Wisdom teeth are usually either impacted forwards into the tooth in front or backwards into the jaw bone.

Why do I need treatment?

An impacted wisdom tooth can cause a number of problems that mean the tooth is best removed. Most commonly these are:

- Repeated infections in the gum surrounding the tooth. This leads to pain and swelling.
- Decay caused by food packing in either the wisdom tooth or the tooth in front.
- Cysts can occasionally form around the wisdom tooth if it doesn't grow into the mouth properly. A cyst occurs when fluid fills the sack that normally surrounds a developing wisdom tooth.

What does the treatment involve?

Because the wisdom tooth has not fully erupted into the mouth it is often necessary to make a cut in the gum over the tooth. Sometimes it is also necessary to remove some bone surrounding the crown of the wisdom tooth. Occasionally the tooth needs to be cut into 2 or 3 pieces to remove it. Once the wisdom tooth has been removed the gum is put back into place with stitches. These stitches are dissolvable and take around two weeks to disappear.

What type of anaesthetic is used?

We will use local anaesthetic. This is an injection into the gum surrounding the wisdom tooth, similar to when you have a filling done at your dentist. The injection takes five minutes or so to numb the area and means that you will feel no pain while the wisdom tooth is removed. This is the best option for wisdom teeth that are simple to remove.

However, if wisdom teeth are likely to be difficult to remove, or when a person is very anxious about having treatment, there are two other options:

- Local anaesthetic and intravenous sedation – in addition to a local anaesthetic injection you can be given an injection into your arm. This makes you feel relaxed and less aware of the procedure.
- General anaesthetic – it is usually possible to remove wisdom teeth under a “day case” general anaesthetic, i.e. although you are put to sleep completely you will be able to go home on the same day as surgery.

If you would like to discuss this option, please feel free to ask. It should be remembered that only local anaesthetic is available at the practice and an additional referral would be needed if other options are preferred.

How long does it take to remove a wisdom tooth?

The time required varies. Some wisdom teeth may take only a few minutes to remove. More difficult wisdom teeth that need to be cut into pieces to remove can take around 20 minutes.

Is there much pain or swelling after the removal of wisdom teeth?

It is likely that there will be some discomfort and swelling both on the inside and outside of your mouth after surgery. This is usually worse for the first three days but it may take up to two weeks before all the soreness goes. You may also find that your jaw is stiff and you may need to eat a soft diet for a week or so.

You will require painkillers – often a combination of paracetamol and ibuprofen is best, but the specialist will discuss this with you. It may also be necessary for you to have a course of antibiotics after the extraction. There may be some bruising of the skin of your face that can take up to a fortnight to fade away.

Is there anything else I need to do after the extractions?

It is important to keep the extraction sites as clean as possible for the first few weeks after surgery. It may be difficult to clean your teeth around the sites of the extraction because it is sore and if this is the case it is best to keep the area free from food debris by gently rinsing with a mouthwash or warm salt water (dissolve a flat teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water) starting on the day **after** surgery.

Do I need to take any time off work?

Often it will be necessary to take a few days off work and avoid strenuous exercise for this time.

What are the possible problems?

Although there may be a little bleeding at the time of the extraction this usually stops very quickly and is unlikely to be a problem if the wound is stitched. Should the area bleed again when you get home this can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the area for at least 30 minutes with a rolled up handkerchief or swab. If the bleeding does not stop, please contact the practice (0116 2519647).

Infection is uncommon particularly if antibiotics are used. However, if you suffer any pain and swelling that worsens (rather than improves) after 4 days, you should contact the practice.

There are two nerves that lie very close to the roots of the lower wisdom teeth. One of these nerves supplies feeling to the lower lip, chin and lower teeth. The other supplies feeling to your tongue and helps with taste. Sometimes these nerves may be bruised when a wisdom tooth is taken out. This can cause tingling, altered sensation (ache or sometimes pain) or numbness in your lip, chin or tongue, and more rarely, altered taste. About one in 10 people will have some tingling or numbness that can last several weeks. Fewer than one in 100 people will have problems that last more than a year. These risks may be higher if your tooth is in a difficult position. The surgeon will tell you if you are considered to be at an increased risk.