

Wisdom Teeth

and what to do about them

Wisdom teeth (also called third molars), usually do not push through the gums until people are in their late teens, twenties or even older. Wisdom teeth are usually the last teeth to come through the gums.

Most people have four wisdom teeth. In many people, not enough space is at the rear of the jaws for wisdom teeth to come easily through the gums. If the jaw does not have enough space for a wisdom tooth to come through, the tooth will become wedged in or 'impacted'. Some impacted wisdom teeth will remain in place and cause no trouble. However, other impacted wisdom teeth may cause severe problems and must be removed.

If one (or more) of your wisdom teeth causes problems, your dentist may recommend that it be removed. Removal of a wisdom tooth is a very common procedure. Removal of troublesome wisdom teeth should usually be done as soon as possible before the problems get worse.

If your wisdom teeth are likely to be very difficult or complicated to remove your dentist may refer you to an oral and maxillofacial surgeon to remove the teeth.

The decision to remove teeth

After inspecting your mouth, jaws and X-rays, your dentist can discuss the diagnosis with you. Your dentist may recommend removal of one or more wisdom teeth or perhaps other options. If the area around the tooth has been infected, your dentist may decide to delay surgery while the infection is treated.

Even though a wisdom tooth has caused problems, it may 'settle down' after it pushes through the gum. Your dentist may delay surgery to see if the tooth stops causing problems.

Some wisdom teeth never cause trouble and may not need to be removed. The decision whether to have wisdom teeth removed is always yours.

Early Removal of Wisdom Teeth

Your dentist may recommend early removal of one or more wisdom teeth due to the following reasons:

- There is not enough room for the tooth to push through.
- The tooth has started to cause trouble. It should be removed soon so that pain, infection or other problems do not get worse.

It is best to have troublesome wisdom teeth removed whilst the patient is young. In young people, a tooth's roots have not formed totally, and the bone surrounding the tooth is softer. This allows for easier removal of the tooth and less risk of damage to the nerves, bones and other teeth.

