

## Wisdom Teeth

### Information for patients

---

#### **What are wisdom teeth?**

Wisdom teeth (also known as third molars) are the last teeth to come through (erupt) at the back of your mouth. They usually appear during your late teenage years or early twenties, but they may appear later in your life. It is not uncommon for our jaws to be small relative to the number and size of our teeth so there may not be enough room for the wisdom teeth to come through properly.

#### **What problems can they cause?**

The wisdom teeth may become jammed or impacted against the teeth in front, preventing them from coming all the way through into the mouth. This may make them difficult to clean, causing the gums to become painful and swollen and infected. The partly erupted wisdom teeth and the teeth in front are prone to decay due to their position and cleaning difficulties. If there is sufficient space in the mouth, the wisdom teeth may still be uncomfortable while they are coming through but will come into a good position.

#### **Is there anything I can do to help myself?**

If your wisdom teeth are painful, you can take painkillers such as ibuprofen or paracetamol. Keep the area as clean as possible by brushing regularly and using a salty mouthwash several times a day. If the pain does not go away after several days, you should see your dentist who may give you an antibiotic or may suggest you have your wisdom teeth removed.

#### **What does the surgery involve?**

Wisdom teeth are usually removed under local anaesthetic, which involves an injection in your mouth. Sedation (which involves an injection into a vein) can be used in addition to this to relax you if you are anxious about the procedure. Very occasionally, a general anaesthetic can be used, which needs to be provided in a hospital environment.

If the tooth is not fully through the gum, the surgeon will surgically uncover the tooth, and may remove a small portion of jaw bone to allow the tooth to be removed. The wound is then sewed together with dissolving stitches. Over-the-counter painkillers (ibuprofen and paracetamol) can be used after wisdom tooth surgery but please ask your pharmacist about the suitability of these drugs in your case.

#### **Are there any complications?**

All operations can cause some pain, discomfort and swelling and may require several days off work. Removing wisdom teeth is also associated with some facial bruising and limitations on mouth opening. You may have to eat a soft diet for up to a week. All these complications normally disappear within a week.

A local infection in the wound can occur in up to 20% of lower wisdom tooth removals. If this happens, you will start to feel increasing pain and you will have a bad taste in your mouth,

usually 3-5 days after surgery. Your dentist should be able to treat this to give you relief from the pain.

Rarely, (in less than 1% of cases) a more serious infection may develop after the operation, usually with symptoms of increasing pain and facial swelling. This kind of infection may need to be treated in hospital and require surgical treatment.

Some nerves can lie close to lower wisdom teeth and while the teeth are being removed there is a risk that they may be injured. This may result in altered sensation of your lower lip, tongue and chin on the affected side. There may also be some disruption to your sense of taste. These nerve complications occur in up to 20% of cases but they are usually temporary, with full recovery expected within days or weeks.

However, in a smaller number of cases (less than 0.5%), damage may last several months or may even be permanent. For further information about these risks in your case, please discuss with your dental surgeon.

**For further information, please contact:**

Department of Oral Surgery  
Edinburgh Dental Institute

**Telephone: 0131 536 1129**

How did we do? Your feedback helps shape services that we provide.

visit: [careopinion.org.uk](https://careopinion.org.uk)

phone: 0800 122 31 35

scan the QR code below

