

Wisdom Teeth



M

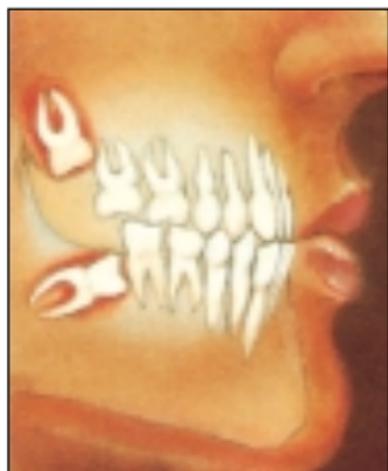
ost people start getting their third molars (also called wisdom teeth) when they reach their late teens or early twenties. In many cases, the jaws are not large enough to accommodate these teeth and they remain under the gum (impacted).

WHAT IS AN IMPACTED TOOTH?

When a tooth develops, it travels to its appropriate position in the dental arch. If the path to eruption through the gum is prevented due to the size of the jaw, the tooth will become partially or totally blocked (impacted).

HOW SERIOUS IS AN IMPACTED TOOTH?

Serious problems can develop from partially blocked teeth such as infection, and possible crowding of and damage to adjacent teeth. More serious complications can develop when the sac that surrounds the impacted tooth fills with fluid and enlarges to form a cyst, causing an enlargement that hollows out the jaw and results in permanent damage to the adjacent teeth, jawbone and nerves. Left untreated, a tumor may develop from the walls of these cysts and a more complicated surgical procedure would be required for removal.



MUST THE TOOTH COME OUT IF IT HASN'T CAUSED ANY PROBLEMS YET?

No one can tell you when your impacted molar will cause trouble, but trouble will probably arise. When it does, the circumstances can be much more painful and the teeth can be more complicated to treat.

WHEN SHOULD I HAVE MY IMPACTED TEETH REMOVED?

The key to timely attention to third molars is regular x-rays of the mouth. With the help of these pictures the oral and maxillofacial surgeon can frequently predict if the wisdom teeth are going to cause trouble, either in the near future or later in life. If so, chances are the oral and maxillofacial surgeon will recommend their removal rather than wait for trouble to occur.

Removal is easier in younger patients. Roots are not yet fully developed and the bone is less dense. In older patients, removal before complications develop is key to shorter recovery and healing time and minimizing discomfort after surgery.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER SURGERY?

Generally after surgery the patient experiences some swelling and discomfort. However, with personalized post-operative instructions and medications, the oral and maxillofacial surgeon can reduce the possible discomfort following surgery. ●



**American Association of Oral
and Maxillofacial Surgeons**

9700 W. Bryn Mawr Avenue
Rosemont, Illinois 60018-5701
847/678-6200 Fax: 847/678-6286
Website: www.aaoms.org

© 1999 American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS).
All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.
P8 (85M/9.99)