

Wisdom teeth

Your wisdom teeth, or third molars, develop last of all your teeth, and crop up in the corners of your mouth. If you have them (not everyone has all four), they will sprout from your gums in your late teens or early 20, and can be beneficial when they are healthy and properly positioned.

But it is not uncommon for wisdom teeth to become impacted, meaning they do not fully erupt from your jaw bone. Your wisdom teeth may grow in at funny angles, or even horizontally. They may cause crowding and shifting among other teeth, or they might get stuck under a part of your gums, causing pain and possibly infection in the future. Wisdom teeth may also be to blame for headaches, earaches and pain felt in your face, neck, throat

Whether or not your wisdom teeth cause you to feel discomfort when they first erupt, many dentists recommend patients have their wisdom teeth removed shortly after they erupt. Wisdom teeth cause more problems than any other tooth in the mouth. Among them:

Decay – bacteria and food particles can collect around an impacted wisdom tooth, since they can be difficult to clean. This can bring on decay both in the wisdom teeth and in adjacent teeth.

Gum infections – bacteria and food can also collect under the gum around an impacted wisdom tooth, causing a gum infection. This may cause bad breath, pain and swelling, and may inhibit your ability to open your mouth. In severe cases, the infection may spread to your cheek or neck.

Pressure damage – as a wisdom tooth erupts, it may put pressure on adjacent teeth and result in pain. Or, the pressure may erode the adjacent teeth.

Crowding – An erupting wisdom tooth may cause other teeth to shift and make room for it. Patients who have had significant orthodontic work to straighten their teeth risk reversing the changes.

Preserving prosthetics – Wisdom teeth that erupt beneath a denture cause severe irritation. Patients will need new dentures following removal of the wisdom tooth to accommodate the changed shape of the gum.

The removal of wisdom teeth may be done at a dentist's office or a hospital, making use of either a local anesthesia (to numb the area around the tooth) or an intravenous, general anesthesia (to make you sleep through the procedure). Once the area has been numbed, the doctor makes an incision, removes soft tissue and surrounding bone that may be obscuring access to the wisdom tooth, and then moves the tooth. The area is then stitched closed and the patient returns home to recuperate.