

Lower Wisdom Teeth (Third Molars)

The Problem

The wisdom tooth or third molar is usually the last tooth to erupt into the mouth any time after about 16 years of age. Frequently there is not enough room to accommodate wisdom teeth and as such they do not come into the mouth normally. When this happens, wisdom teeth are said to be 'impacted'. Wisdom teeth are usually impacted forwards into the tooth in front or backwards into the jawbone.

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 attacks of infection in the gum surrounding the tooth. This leads to pain and swelling
- Food packing which causes decay in either the wisdom tooth or the tooth in front
- Cysts can form around the wisdom tooth if it does not come 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 is not fully erupted into the mouth it is often necessary to make a cut in the gum over the tooth. Sometimes it is necessary to remove some bone surrounding the crown of the wisdom tooth. The tooth may need to be divided 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 are dissolvable and take around two weeks to disappear.

What type of anaesthetic is used?

Local Anaesthetic: this is an injection into gum surrounding the wisdom tooth, similar to the type you have at your dentist for a filling. The injection takes a couple of minutes to numb the area and means that you will feel no pain whilst the tooth is removed. This is the best option for wisdom teeth that are simple to remove.

What should I do about my medications? You should continue your normal medication unless you are told otherwise. It is important that you let your surgeon know if you are taking any medication.

How long does it take to remove a wisdom tooth?

This varies. Some wisdom teeth may take only a few minutes to remove. More difficult wisdom teeth may take around 30 minutes to extract.

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 soft foods for a week or so. If it is likely to be particularly sore, your surgeon will arrange for some strong painkillers for 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 on 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 site of the extraction because it is sore. If this is the case, it's best to keep the area free from food debris by gently rinsing with a mouthwash or warm salt water (dissolve one flat teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water). You can start this the day after surgery.

Do I need to take any time off work?

It's sometimes 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 it is unlikely to be a problem if the wound is stitched. If the area bleeds again when you get home this can usually be stopped by applying gentle pressure over the area for at least 15 minutes with a gauze swab or handkerchief. If the bleeding does not stop, please contact us.
- Although infection is uncommon, it is possible, particularly in patients who smoke after surgery. You may be prescribed a course of antibiotics after surgery.
- There are two nerves that lie very close to the roots of lower wisdom teeth. One of these supplies the feeling to your lower teeth, lip and chin. The other supplies the feeling to your tongue. Sometimes these nerves may be bruised or stretched when a wisdom tooth is taken out. This can cause tingling or numbness in your lower lip, chin or tongue and more rarely altered taste. About one in ten people will have some tingling or numbness that can last several weeks. Less than one in a hundred (0.5 – 1.0%) will have problems that last more than a year and very rarely can be permanent. These risks may be higher if your tooth is in a difficult position. The surgeon will tell you if you are considered to be a higher risk.