

What You Need to Know About Wisdom Teeth

If they grow in properly, wisdom teeth are no different than any other teeth in your mouth. However, if they become impacted, or erupt in a strange angle or location, they may need to be removed. Learn more about your wisdom teeth and wisdom tooth extractions.

What are wisdom teeth?

Wisdom teeth are another name for the third molars. Most people have three permanent molars in each quadrant of their mouth. First molars typically erupt around age 6, while second molars emerge around age 12.

The third molars are the last to erupt. They are referred to as wisdom teeth because they tend to develop later in life than other teeth, between the ages of 17 and 21.

Why do wisdom teeth sometimes need to be removed?

Some wisdom teeth may become impacted (prevented from erupting properly). Many dentists recommend the extraction of impacted wisdom teeth because of the problems they may cause, including infection, decay of adjacent teeth, gum disease, cysts, and tumors.

Wisdom teeth that have already erupted also may need to be removed if they are nonfunctional, badly decayed, interfering with your bite, involved with or at risk of gum disease, or causing problems with adjacent teeth or restorations. Some dentists also may recommend removing

wisdom teeth before they're fully erupted in order to prevent such problems from developing.

How do I know if I need my wisdom teeth removed?

Individuals whose wisdom teeth need to be removed may experience a variety of symptoms, including pain, infection, and swelling of the face or gumline. Your dentist can determine whether you need your wisdom teeth removed by taking X-rays and examining your mouth. Wisdom teeth that are not removed should be monitored, as they may cause problems later in life. Extraction is usually an outpatient procedure, performed by a dentist or oral surgeon using a local sedation or general anesthetic.

Are there any complications associated with wisdom tooth extractions?

The most common complication associated with wisdom tooth extractions is dry socket, a painful condition that occurs when the blood clot at the extraction site does not form correctly or is lost prematurely. Because this blood clot serves as the foundation for new tissue and bone to develop, dry socket delays the normal healing process.

To prevent dry socket, do not smoke, consume carbonated beverages, or drink through a straw after a wisdom tooth extraction. Rinsing with salt water can help keep your mouth clean after the



procedure. However, you should avoid excessive rinsing or spitting while your mouth heals.

Additionally, studies have shown that the high levels of estrogen found during the first 22 days of the menstrual cycle and in certain oral contraceptives may increase a woman's chances of developing dry socket. To decrease this risk, if possible, women should schedule extractions during the last week of their menstrual cycle.

Before tooth extraction, be sure to tell your dentist about any medications or supplements that you are taking, as they could interfere with the healing process. To avoid complications after the procedure, follow your dentist's instructions regarding eating and drinking, pain management, and keeping the extraction site clean.

Everyone's mouth is different, and only a dentist can determine whether your wisdom teeth need to be removed. If you have concerns about your wisdom teeth or wisdom tooth extraction, talk to your general dentist.



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The AGD is a member of the Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives, a first-of-its-kind national dental coalition composed of 37 leading dental health organizations. Look for more information about the Kids' Healthy Mouths campaign at www.2min2x.org.

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