

Removing Wisdom Teeth

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What are wisdom teeth?

Wisdom teeth are the teeth at the back of your mouth (the third molar teeth). Some wisdom teeth do not come through fully (partially erupt) and get stuck (or impacted) against nearby teeth or bone. This often leaves a flap of gum over your tooth. Others grow too long (over erupt).

A wisdom tooth may need to be removed for one or more of the following reasons.

- Repeated or serious infection of the gum
- Tooth decay
- A wisdom tooth can grow out too far and damage the cheek or gum
- You may need an operation to move your jaw forwards or backwards
- Your tooth may be in a position that makes it difficult to clean properly
- You may have a cyst near or around your tooth
- An orthodontist may need to make space to move other teeth backwards
- Your tooth may be in the line of a jaw fracture

Are there any alternatives to removing a wisdom tooth?

Simple painkillers such as paracetamol can help control mild pain caused by wisdom teeth.

Antibiotics and rinsing with hot, salty water or chlorhexidine mouthwash can help when the area around the wisdom tooth is infected.

Removing the gum lying over your tooth (operculectomy) may be possible in certain cases if a wisdom tooth has partially erupted.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation or the operation is delayed?

Your symptoms may get worse or return. There is a risk of getting a serious, life-threatening infection.

If you need to have your wisdom tooth removed before you can have corrective surgery or other

orthodontic treatment, the surgery or treatment may not be possible. Impacted wisdom teeth do not cause crowded front teeth.

If you have increased pain, contact your dentist.

What does the operation involve?

Most upper wisdom teeth can be removed easily under a local anaesthetic. Lower wisdom teeth can be more difficult to remove.

Sometimes you will need a general anaesthetic. The operation usually takes 10 minutes to an hour, depending on how many wisdom teeth need to be removed and how difficult they are to remove.

Removing a wisdom tooth can involve cutting the gum to uncover your tooth, removing bone around your tooth and dividing your tooth with a drill.

How can I prepare myself for the operation?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health. Stopping smoking and keeping your mouth clean significantly reduces the risk of infection in a wisdom-tooth socket.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

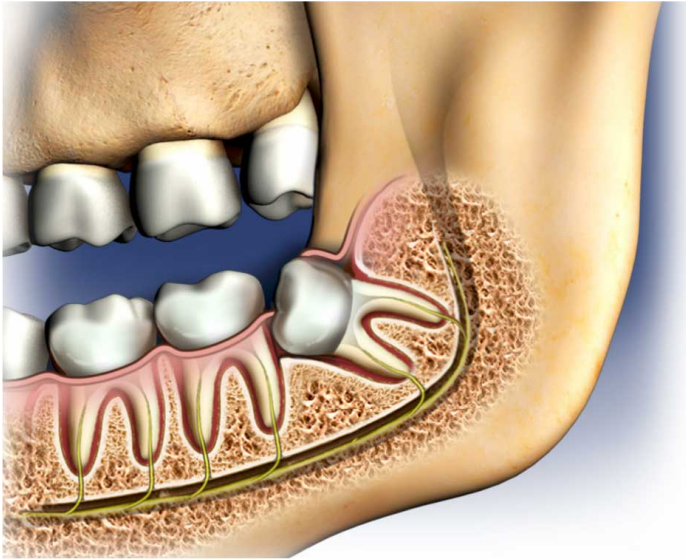
Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Speak to the healthcare team about any vaccinations you might need to reduce your risk of serious illness while you recover. When you come into hospital, practise hand washing and wear a face covering when asked.

What complications can happen?

General complications of any operation

- Bleeding
- Swelling and bruising



An impacted lower wisdom tooth

- Infection
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- Chest infection

Specific complications of this operation

- Dry socket
- Retained roots, where it is not possible to remove the whole tooth
- Damage to nearby teeth
- Damage to nerves
- Sinus problems
- Broken jaw
- Not being able to open your mouth fully (trismus) and jaw stiffness
- Osteonecrosis, a rare condition where tissue in your jawbone starts to die

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home the same day.

Depending on the difficulty of the operation and the risk of infection, you may be given antibiotics.

Try to leave your wound alone for 1 to 2 days.

Then rinse your mouth gently with hot, salty water four times a day for the next 2 days.

To reduce the risk of bleeding, swelling and bruising, do not exercise, drink alcohol or have a hot bath for 1 week.

You should be able to return to normal activities within a week.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Most people make a full recovery.

Summary

Wisdom teeth can sometimes cause serious problems.

Removing a wisdom tooth is usually a safe and effective way to prevent your symptoms from coming back.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

Acknowledgements

Reviewer

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Illustrator

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