

MF01lite Removing Wisdom Teeth

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This document will give you information about removing wisdom teeth. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What are wisdom teeth?

Wisdom teeth are the teeth at the back of your mouth (the third molar teeth). They tend to come through (erupt) in the late teens or twenties. Some wisdom teeth do not come through fully (partly erupt) and get stuck (or impacted). This often leaves a flap of gum over the tooth (see figure 1). Others grow too long (over erupt).

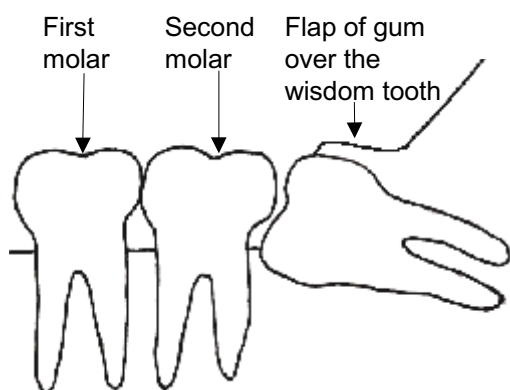


Figure 1

An impacted lower wisdom tooth

A wisdom tooth may need to be removed for several reasons such as tooth decay, repeated or severe infection, to make space to move other teeth or to prevent damage to the cheek or gum.

What are the benefits of surgery?

Surgery can prevent symptoms returning or allow nearby teeth to be treated.

Are there any alternatives to removing a wisdom tooth?

Simple painkillers can help control mild pain. Antibiotics and rinsing with hot, salty water or chlorhexidine mouthwash, can help when the area around the wisdom tooth is infected. These measures give only temporary relief of symptoms and do not treat the underlying cause.

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

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. The operation usually takes between ten minutes and an hour.

Sometimes a general anaesthetic is needed. Removing a wisdom tooth can involve cutting the gum to uncover the tooth, removing bone around the tooth and dividing the tooth with a drill.

What complications can happen?

1 General complications

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Swelling and bruising
- Infection

2 Specific complications

- Dry socket
- Retained roots
- Damage to nearby teeth
- Sinus problems
- Broken jaw
- Not being able to open the mouth fully (trismus) and jaw stiffness
- Damage to nerves
- Bisphosphonate-associated osteonecrosis of the jaw

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home the same day.

Depending on the difficulty of the operation and the likelihood of infection, you may be prescribed antibiotics.

You should not do any strenuous activities for the first 48 hours to reduce the risk of bleeding, swelling and bruising. You may need to take up to a week off work.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, you should ask a member of 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 symptoms coming back.

Acknowledgements

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