

Wisdom Teeth Removal

Patient information leaflet

Wisdom Teeth Removal

Wisdom tooth (third molar) is the last tooth to erupt in the mouth and there are usually 4 wisdom teeth. These are the last teeth to erupt and very often there is not enough room in the jaw for them to fully come through in which case they are called 'impacted'.

Impacted wisdom teeth can cause multiple problems such as:

- Recurrent infections of the overlying gum with associated pain and swelling
- Food packing which causes decay to the wisdom tooth or the tooth in front
- Gum disease
- Cyst or an abscess can also form around an impacted wisdom tooth

Treatment

The treatment of problematic wisdom teeth is usually their removal or removal of only the top part of the tooth (coronectomy).

The procedure can be carried out under local anaesthesia (injection in the gum to numb the area), with or without intravenous sedation (injection in the arm or hand to reduce anxiety), or under general anaesthetic (completely asleep).

It is often necessary to make a cut in the gum over the tooth. Sometimes it is also necessary to remove some bone surrounding the crown of the wisdom tooth. Rarely the tooth needs to be cut into 2 or 3 pieces to remove it. Once the wisdom tooth has been removed the gum is put back into place with stitches.

What to expect afterwards?

- Pain/swelling/bruising - after a few hours when the local anaesthetic wears off painkillers are usually required. Swelling is common and tends to be at a maximum, on the 2nd and 3rd day after surgery reducing over about a week. Bruising occasionally occurs on the face and neck.
- Bleeding - blood stained saliva may be noticed for a day or two. More persistent bleeding may occur which can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the area for at least 10 minutes with a gauze or a handkerchief. If the bleeding does not stop please contact the department.
- Stitches - In the majority of cases the stitches are dissolvable and take around two weeks to disappear.

- Infection - it is important to keep the extraction sites as clean as possible for the first few weeks after surgery. Try brushing your teeth as normal and use warm salty mouth-washes (dissolve a teaspoon of salt in a cup of warm water) commencing on the day after surgery. We strongly advise against smoking for at least 48 hours after the procedure.

- Going back to work? - Usually it is necessary to take at least a couple of days off work and rest. Depending on the type of anaesthetic used you may not be able to drive (24 hours after intravenous sedation and for 48 hours after a general anaesthetic)

- Altered sensation to lip/chin/tongue - There are two nerves that lie very close to the roots of the lower wisdom teeth. One of these nerves supplies feeling to your lower lip, chin and lower teeth. The other supplies feeling to your tongue and helps with taste. Sometimes these nerves may be bruised when a wisdom tooth is taken out. This can cause tingling or numbness in your lip, chin or tongue, and more rarely altered taste. About one in 10 people will have some tingling or numbness that can last several weeks. Less than one in 100 people will have problems that last more than a year. These risks may be higher if your tooth is in a difficult position. The surgeon will tell you if you are considered to be at an increased risk.