

ODA PATIENT'S PAGE

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Wisdom Teeth

Wisdom teeth are the third and final set of molars that most people get in their late teens or early twenties. Sometimes these teeth can be a valuable asset to the mouth when healthy and properly aligned, but more often, they are misaligned and require removal.

Wisdom teeth present potential problems when they are misaligned – they can position themselves horizontally, be angled toward or away from the second molars, or be angled inward or outward. Poor alignment of wisdom teeth can crowd or damage adjacent teeth, the jawbone, and/or nerves. Wisdom teeth can lean toward the second molars making them more vulnerable to decay by entrapping plaque and debris. In addition, wisdom teeth can be entrapped completely within the soft tissue and/or the jawbone, or only partially break through or erupt through the gum. Teeth that remain partially or completely entrapped within the soft tissue and /or the jawbone are termed “impacted”. Wisdom teeth that only partially erupt allow an opening for bacteria to enter around the tooth and cause an infection, which can result in pain, swelling, jaw stiffness, and general illness. Partially-erupted teeth are also more prone to tooth decay and gum disease because their hard-to-reach location and awkward positioning makes brushing and flossing difficult.

Wisdom Tooth Extraction

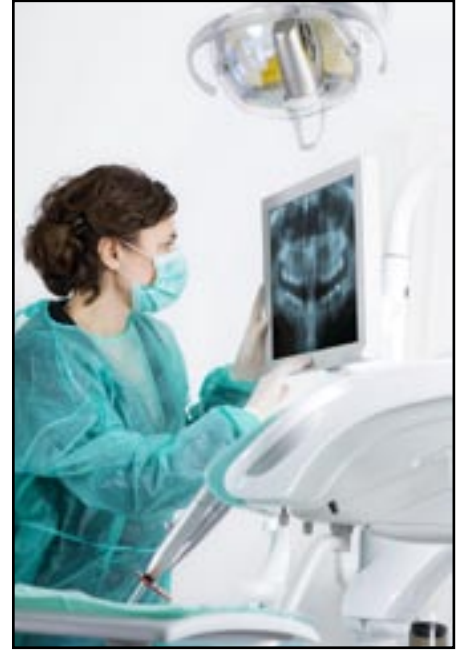
An oral and maxillofacial surgeon or your dentist can remove (extract) a wisdom tooth. The procedure can often be done in the dentist's or surgeon's office. You may have the surgery in the hospital, especially if you are having all your wisdom teeth extracted at one time or if you are at high risk for complications.

If you have an infection, surgery will usually be delayed until the infection has cleared up. Your doctor or dentist may have you take antibiotics to help heal the infection.

Before removing a wisdom tooth, your dentist will give you a local anesthetic to numb the area around the tooth. A general anesthetic may be used, especially if several or all of your wisdom teeth will be removed at the same time. A general anesthetic prevents pain in the whole body and will make you groggy or cause you to sleep through the procedure. Your dentist will probably recommend that you don't eat or drink after midnight on the night before surgery, so you are prepared for the anesthetic.

To remove the wisdom tooth, your dentist will open up the gum tissue over the tooth and take out any bone that is covering the tooth. He or she will separate the tissue connecting the tooth to the bone and then remove the tooth. Sometimes the dentist will cut the tooth into smaller pieces to make it easier to remove.

After the tooth is removed, you may need stitches. Some stitches dissolve over time and some have to be removed by the dentist after a few days. Your dentist will tell you whether he or she will need to remove your stitches. A folded cotton gauze pad placed over the wound will help stop the bleeding.



Ask your dentist about the positioning of your wisdom teeth. He or she may take an X-ray periodically to evaluate for the presence and alignment of your wisdom teeth. Your dentist may also decide to send you to an oral surgeon for further evaluation.