



This leaflet has been designed to explain wisdom tooth removal and it contains answers to many frequently asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer, or if you would like further information, please ask us.

### Why do wisdom teeth cause problems?

Wisdom teeth usually appear in the mouth between the ages of 18 and 25 but can appear at any age after this. Some people do not have enough space in their mouth for the wisdom teeth when they appear. Without enough space, the teeth will not come through normally and may become trapped (impacted). Impacted teeth which are partly through into your mouth can cause repeated pain and infection. They can also trap food and make it impossible to clean the area fully. This can cause a bad taste or smell. It also makes decay and gum disease much more likely. Sometimes, a cyst can form around a buried wisdom tooth.

### Can I leave them where they are?

Not all wisdom teeth cause problems. However, it is important to know that problems can occur without causing pain. If wisdom teeth which are causing problems (such as decay, gum disease or infection) are not removed, it may be impossible to solve the problems in any other way. Your dentist will discuss your situation with you and explain why your particular wisdom teeth need to be removed (extracted).

### What is involved in removing a wisdom tooth?

Some wisdom teeth are completely straightforward, ordinary extractions. However, if your tooth is only partly through the gum then some extra steps (surgery) may be necessary. You may need a small cut in the gum over your tooth. Sometimes it is necessary to remove part of the bone around the tooth. Also, it is sometimes necessary to cut the tooth into two or three pieces to make it easier to remove. This is done using a drill.

Removing a wisdom tooth surgically is a short procedure – normally less than 20 minutes and often only 5 - 10 minutes. You should not feel any pain during the procedure but you will feel pressure and hear noises.

Sometimes it is necessary to leave a small part of the root behind if removing it is considered to be too risky. This very rarely causes any problems afterwards and your dentist will tell you if this has happened. Sometimes your dentist will plan from the beginning to deliberately leave all the roots behind, if removing them is considered to be very risky. This is called a **coronectomy** and your dentist will discuss this with you at the planning stage. You may need one or two stitches after your tooth has been removed. Stitches dissolve on their own in about two weeks. You will need to keep the area very clean while it heals – your dentist will tell you how best to do this.

## What sort of appointment will I need?

There are usually three options – depending on how difficult the extraction will be.

These appointment options are:

1. **Local Anaesthetic** – an injection into your gum to make the area completely numb - just as you would have for a filling with your own dentist. This is by far the most common method and suitable for most wisdom tooth extractions.
2. **Local Anaesthetic with Sedation** – an injection into your arm or a gas to breathe to help you feel more relaxed during treatment.
3. **General Anaesthetic** – you are put to sleep completely in a hospital theatre. This is the least common method and is generally only used for extremely difficult teeth.

## What should I expect afterwards?

- Some slight **bleeding** is normal for a day or so - this is usually easily controlled with pressure over the area.
- Some **pain** is normal - your dentist will advise you about painkillers to use and give you a prescription if necessary.
- Some **swelling** and **bruising** is normal but the amount varies a lot from one patient to another.
- Swelling will be at its worst on the second day and most swelling should have disappeared within a week or two. With swelling you may also have some difficulty opening your mouth wide but this also generally returns to normal within a week or two.
- Any **stitches** you have will fall out by themselves in about 10 - 14 days.
- You may need to take **time off** – your dentist will advise you about this.

## What are the risks?

**Infection** can happen but it is not common. If infection happens, it is treated with antibiotics.

You might develop a **dry socket**. This happens when the blood clot that should form in the socket does not form properly or falls out for some reason. Dry socket is painful but temporary. If it occurs, you will notice that your pain gets worse rather than better two or three days after your tooth was removed. It is treated by your dentist by putting a dressing into the socket and prescribing strong painkillers.

Dry socket is more common in people who smoke and in women who take the contraceptive pill.

**An important risk associated with the extraction of lower wisdom teeth is the possibility of damage to nerves near the roots of the wisdom teeth.** Damage like this would cause numbness, tingling or pain in the lower lip on the same side as the tooth - or along the edge of your tongue beside the tooth. Very rarely, the sense of taste may also be changed on that side. Damage like this is usually temporary but in rare cases (less than 1 in 100), the change in feeling or taste may be permanent. There would be no change in your appearance (no drooping or dribbling) but you would be aware of the change in how your lip or tongue feels. Your dentist will tell you how likely nerve damage is in your particular case.