

Impacted Wisdom Teeth (page 1 of 2)



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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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What are impacted wisdom teeth?

The wisdom teeth (or third molar) are usually the last teeth to erupt into the mouth. Often there is not enough room for them so they do not come into the mouth normally. When this happens, the wisdom teeth are said to be 'impacted'.

Initial assessment

To make sure that you receive the best treatment your surgeon will take your medical and dental history. Your mouth, teeth and jaws will be examined. After assessing the findings, your surgeon will make a recommendation on whether and how your wisdom teeth are removed. The final decision is yours.

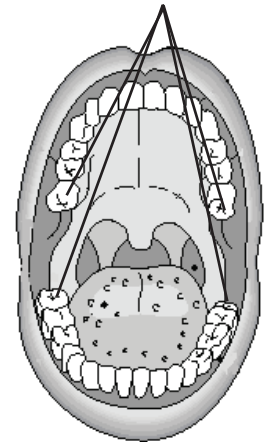
What are the alternatives?

Antibiotics can help treat an infection, but symptoms tend to flare up again. Having wisdom teeth removed is often the only way to permanently relieve your symptoms.

What are the possible risks of the procedure?

- Although there may be a little bleeding at the time of the extraction this usually stops very quickly and is unlikely to be a problem. If the area bleeds again when you get home this can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the area for at least 10 minutes with a rolled up handkerchief or swab. If the bleeding does not stop, please contact the Department.
- Infection is uncommon, particularly if antibiotics are used.
- 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.

Wisdom teeth



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- Accidental damage to other teeth and jaw during your operation.
- Severe pain caused by dry socket - this is when the blood clot breaks away from the wound exposing the bone and nerves, causing pain and delaying healing. This is more likely if you smoke in the first 48 hours after the procedure. If you think you are not able to go without smoking during this time then using nicotine patches or other nicotine replacement is better than a proper cigarette.

What does the treatment involve?

Because the wisdom tooth has not fully erupted into the mouth 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. It can take up to half an hour for the procedure. In the majority of cases these stitches are dissolvable and take around two weeks to disappear.

What type of anaesthetic is used?

Most wisdom teeth are removed using a local anaesthetic, sometimes in combination with sedation. Occasionally a general anaesthetic may be suggested.

Will it hurt afterwards?

It is likely that there will be some discomfort and swelling both on the inside and outside of your mouth after surgery. This is usually worse for the first three days but it may take up to two weeks before all the soreness goes. You may also find that your jaw is stiff and you may need to eat a soft diet for a week or so. If it is likely to be sore your surgeon will arrange painkillers for you. It may also be necessary for you to have a course of antibiotics after the extraction. There may be some bruising of the skin of your face that can take up to a fortnight to fade away.

Is there anything else I need to do after the extractions?

It is important to keep the area where the tooth has been removed as clean as possible for the first few weeks after surgery. It may be difficult to clean your teeth around the sites of the extraction because it is sore and, if this is the case it is best to keep the area free from food debris by gently rinsing with a mouthwash or warm salt water (dissolve a flat teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water) starting on the day after surgery.

Do I need to take any time off work?

Most people need a few days off work afterwards but if it is a difficult procedure or many teeth have been removed you may need to take a week off.

Further advice

The British Dental Health Foundation. Offers free expert advice on oral health problems from Monday to Friday 9-5pm 0845 0631188. www.dentalhealth.org/wisdom-teeth