

Guidance on the removal of wisdom teeth

What are Wisdom Teeth and why are they operated on?

Adult teeth normally come through from the age of 6 upwards, with the wisdom teeth being the last to arrive (usually between the ages of 18 & 24 years).

Sometimes, as wisdom teeth come through, they can cause problems. The term used to describe those wisdom teeth that don't come through normally is impacted wisdom teeth. Two reasons for this are a lack of space, or other teeth being in the way.

For most people, impacted wisdom teeth cause no problems at all, but some people can suffer problems such as inflammation of the surrounding gum, a higher risk of tooth decay, gum disease in other teeth, and possibly problems with teeth in later life.

Removal of wisdom teeth is one of the most common operations carried out in the UK. In some cases wisdom teeth removal is a very appropriate procedure. It is important for you the patient to understand that, as with all operations the removal of wisdom teeth is not without risks there is a one percent risk of permanent tingling or numbness of the lower lip, chin, lower teeth and tongue on the side of the mouth the procedure is carried out. In other cases there may be transient numbness. This is more common.

What do National Guidelines recommend about the removal of Wisdom Teeth?

Based on the evidence, guidelines recommend that: Impacted wisdom teeth that are free from disease (healthy) should not be operated on. There are two reasons for this:

- a) There is no reliable research to suggest that this practice benefits patients.
- b) Patients who do have healthy wisdom teeth removed are being exposed to the risks of surgery. These can include, nerve damage, damage to other teeth, infection and bleeding. Also, after surgery to remove wisdom teeth, patients may have swelling, pain and be unable to open their mouth fully.

Only patients, who have diseased wisdom teeth, or other problems with their mouth, should have their wisdom teeth removed. Your dental surgeon will be aware of the sort of disease or condition which would require you to have surgery. Examples include untreatable tooth decay, abscesses, cysts or tumours, disease of the tissues around the tooth or where the tooth is in the way of other surgery.

What should I do?

If you, a member of your family, or someone you care for are having problems with their wisdom teeth you should discuss this advice with your dental surgeon.

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