



#### Principals

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## Wisdom Teeth

**Wisdom Teeth are the very back teeth in the upper and lower jaw, and usually erupt into the mouth between the ages of 17 to 21. The wisdom teeth that have not erupted in the normal position are often described as “impacted”.**

### Problems associated with impacted Wisdom Teeth

The most common problem associated with impacted wisdom teeth is **pericoronitis**. This is an infection of the gum overlying the impacted lower wisdom teeth which can cause severe swelling and pain. Wisdom teeth that have not erupted into an ideal position can also cause **food trapping**, which may increase the chance of tooth decay of the adjacent teeth. In addition, **crowding** of the front teeth is often attributed to pressure from impacted wisdom teeth (although the data is inconclusive).

Less commonly, impacted wisdom teeth can cause **resorption** of the root of the second molar (the tooth in front of the wisdom teeth). Buried wisdom teeth can also be associated with development of a **cyst**.

### Removal of Wisdom Teeth

The removal of impacted wisdom teeth involves a minor surgical procedure. The tooth is usually uncovered by lifting back the gum and removing some of the overlying bone. The tooth may be divided to facilitate removal, and self-dissolving stitches may be used. Over the next few months, the space left behind will fill with new bone.

### After the procedure

The most common after-effects following wisdom teeth removal are **pain, swelling** and **bruising**. It is usual for pain to be experienced in the first few days, and there may be noticeable swelling of the cheeks in the first week. There may also be limited jaw movement following the operation, so rest and a soft diet is appropriate.

### Possible complications

As with all surgical procedures, there are risks associated with the removal of wisdom teeth. Post-operative complication includes:

- **“dry socket”** – a painful condition arising from loss of the blood clot in the socket. This is strongly associated with smoking and can be treated when it occurs.
- **post-operative bleeding** - commonly in patients on “blood-thinning” drugs
- **post-operative infection** - uncommon, and treated with antibiotics

The lower wisdom teeth lie next to nerves which supply sensation to the lower lip, chin and lateral tongue of its own side. An uncommon but serious post-operative complication is **loss of sensation (numbness)** to the area supplied by these nerves. This altered sensation is usually temporary although recovery may take 6-12 months. On rare occasions, this loss of feeling can be permanent with complete loss of feeling in the lip or tongue on the affected side.

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