



National Dental
Centre Singapore
SingHealth

Wisdom Teeth

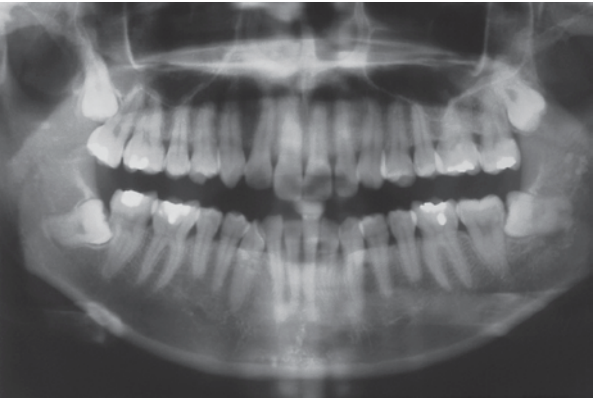


What are wisdom teeth?

Wisdom teeth are the permanent third molars. Most people have four wisdom teeth, two in the upper jaw and two in the lower jaw. These teeth are commonly called wisdom teeth because they usually erupt between the ages of 16 and 21, a period which has been termed "the age of wisdom".

When is a wisdom tooth impacted?

A wisdom tooth is impacted when it is obstructed from erupting fully into the mouth, by the tooth in front of it or the surrounding bone and gums.



X-ray showing four impacted wisdom teeth

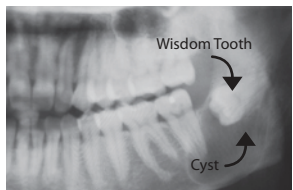
Problems Caused by Impacted Wisdom Teeth

Improperly erupted wisdom teeth are breeding grounds for bacteria and may cause tooth decay, sometimes even affecting the neighbouring teeth. Infection of the overlying gums can take place as well, resulting in pain and swelling.

More serious problems such as formation of cysts or tumours around an impacted tooth can occur, leading to destruction of the surrounding jawbone and neighbouring teeth. These conditions may require complex and extensive treatment. As problems can develop silently without your knowledge, a check-up with your dentist is advisable.



Impacted wisdom tooth causing decay in the second molar



X-ray image showing cyst formation around wisdom tooth

Check-up and Consultation

Your initial visit to the dentist would include an examination of your mouth and x-rays to determine the position of the wisdom teeth, their condition and the status of the adjacent teeth and bone.

To prevent problems associated with impacted wisdom teeth, it is advisable to remove them early. The best time to remove them would be during the teenage years, before the roots of the teeth are fully formed and firmly embedded in the jawbone. Healing is also better during this period, with less risk of complications.

Wisdom Tooth Surgery

This is a minor surgical procedure that can usually be performed with little discomfort. The procedure can be performed under local anaesthesia (with or without sedation to control anxiety) or general anaesthesia. Your surgeon will advise you on the type most appropriate for your needs.

The surgery involves uncovering the tooth by lifting the overlying gums aside to expose the tooth and bone. The tooth may need to be sectioned in order to remove it. The gums are then stitched back.

After the Surgery

After surgery, some minor bleeding from the wound can be expected, which can be controlled by biting on a piece of gauze over the operation area for about half an hour. Facial swelling and discolouration of the overlying skin will also develop, increasing for the first 72 hours and subsiding thereafter. You may not be able to open your mouth as wide as usual for a few days.

Painkillers, antibiotics and an antiseptic mouthwash are usually prescribed after the surgery. You will be advised to maintain good oral hygiene and also to keep to a soft diet for a few days following surgery.



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