



# Wisdom Teeth

## What You Should Know About Third Molars

### What Are Wisdom Teeth?

Wisdom teeth, also known as **third molars**, are the last permanent teeth to develop. They usually erupt between the ages of **17 and 25**, although some people develop them earlier or later, and some never develop wisdom teeth at all.

Many wisdom teeth erupt normally and function like other teeth. However, others may not have enough room to emerge properly, which can lead to dental problems.

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### Why Are They Called Wisdom Teeth?

These teeth typically appear during the late teenage years or early adulthood—a stage of life traditionally associated with greater maturity or "wisdom."

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### What Is an Impacted Wisdom Tooth?

A wisdom tooth is considered **impacted** when it cannot fully erupt into the mouth because it is blocked by another tooth, bone, or gum tissue.

An impacted tooth may remain:

- Completely beneath the gums
- Partially erupted
- Growing at an angle
- Lying sideways within the jawbone

Some impacted wisdom teeth never cause symptoms, while others may lead to complications.

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# Common Problems Associated with Wisdom Teeth

Not all wisdom teeth require removal, but they can sometimes contribute to:

## **Pain**

Pressure from an erupting or impacted wisdom tooth may cause discomfort in the back of the mouth.

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## **Gum Infection**

Partially erupted wisdom teeth can create a space where bacteria and food become trapped, leading to inflammation and infection of the surrounding gum tissue (pericoronitis).

Symptoms may include:

- Swelling
  - Pain
  - Difficulty chewing
  - Bad taste or bad breath
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## **Tooth Decay**

Because wisdom teeth are difficult to clean, they may be more likely to develop cavities.

Nearby second molars may also be affected if food and bacteria become trapped between the teeth.

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## **Damage to Adjacent Teeth**

In some cases, impacted wisdom teeth may place pressure on neighboring teeth, increasing the risk of damage or periodontal problems.

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## **Cysts (Rare)**

Rarely, a fluid-filled sac (cyst) may develop around an impacted wisdom tooth and affect the surrounding bone or nearby teeth.

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## Do All Wisdom Teeth Need to Be Removed?

No.

Wisdom teeth **do not automatically require removal**.

A dentist or oral surgeon may recommend keeping wisdom teeth if they are:

- Healthy
- Fully erupted
- Properly positioned
- Easy to clean
- Not causing problems

Removal is considered when there is evidence that a wisdom tooth is causing disease or has a high likelihood of causing future problems.

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## Signs You Should See a Dentist

Schedule an evaluation if you experience:

- Pain near the back teeth
- Swollen gums
- Difficulty opening your mouth
- Bad breath that does not improve
- Swelling of the face or jaw
- Difficulty chewing
- Repeated infections around a wisdom tooth

These symptoms do not always mean extraction is necessary, but they should be evaluated promptly.

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# How Are Wisdom Teeth Evaluated?

Your dentist may examine:

- Your mouth and gums
- Tooth eruption
- Bite alignment
- Signs of infection

Dental X-rays or panoramic X-rays are commonly used to determine:

- The position of the wisdom teeth
  - Whether they are impacted
  - Their relationship to nearby teeth and nerves
  - Whether any disease is present
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## Wisdom Tooth Removal

If removal is recommended, the procedure is usually performed by a dentist or oral and maxillofacial surgeon.

Depending on the position of the tooth, treatment may involve:

- Local anesthesia
- Sedation
- General anesthesia in selected cases

Your dental provider will discuss the most appropriate option for your situation.

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## Recovery After Removal

Most people recover within several days after wisdom tooth extraction.

Your dentist may recommend:

- Rest for the first 24 hours
- Applying cold packs to reduce swelling
- Eating soft foods
- Drinking plenty of water

- Following all postoperative instructions carefully

Proper aftercare helps reduce the risk of complications and supports healing.

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## Can Wisdom Teeth Be Prevented?

No.

Wisdom teeth are a normal part of human dental development.

Regular dental examinations and X-rays help monitor their development so that problems can be identified early.

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## Common Myths

**"Everyone needs their wisdom teeth removed."**

**False.**

Many people keep their wisdom teeth for life without experiencing problems.

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**"If wisdom teeth don't hurt, they must be healthy."**

**Not always.**

Some impacted wisdom teeth cause no symptoms while still contributing to disease or damage that can only be detected during a dental examination.

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**"Removing wisdom teeth is always an emergency."**

**False.**

Most wisdom tooth extractions are planned procedures performed after careful evaluation.

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# Key Takeaways

- ✓ Wisdom teeth are the last permanent teeth to develop.
  - ✓ Not all wisdom teeth require removal.
  - ✓ Impacted wisdom teeth may increase the risk of infection, cavities, or damage to nearby teeth.
  - ✓ Regular dental examinations and X-rays help monitor wisdom tooth development.
  - ✓ Treatment decisions are based on your individual oral health—not age alone.
  - ✓ Early evaluation helps prevent unnecessary complications.
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## References

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