

What are wisdom teeth and why do they become impacted?

Wisdom teeth is the term commonly used for 'third molars'. Normally, everyone has four wisdom teeth that appear at the end of each row of the top and bottom teeth between the ages of 17-25 years. Due to their late eruption, often there is a lack of room to accommodate them. When they are prevented from reaching their functional position, they are deemed as impacted as shown below.



Figure 1. Impacted wisdom tooth (circled)

What will I experience if my wisdom teeth become impacted?

- While most young adults, worldwide, have one or more impacted wisdom teeth, only 10% are associated with symptoms.
- Most of those who develop symptoms feel minor discomfort associated with "teething".
- The development and significance of these symptoms are related to poor oral hygiene.
- Sometimes, it is difficult to clean around and in between the wisdom tooth and the tooth in front of it. This might lead to tooth decay and gum diseases. Accordingly, you might experience pain, recurrent infections, swelling and difficulty in opening your mouth. If you develop such symptoms, you need to see your dentist to get the appropriate treatment.

Can impacted wisdom teeth cause crowding of my lower front teeth or relapse after teeth straightening procedures (orthodontic treatment)?

There are claims that impacted wisdom teeth generate pushing forces in the lower jaw leading to crowding of the lower front teeth or relapse after orthodontic treatment. However, the available evidence suggests that this is not clinically significant. Therefore, the extraction of disease-free impacted wisdom teeth to prevent crowding or relapse after orthodontic treatment is not justified.

How do I know if my wisdom teeth will cause trouble for me and need to be removed?

Your dentist will be able to advise you about your wisdom teeth after obtaining medical and dental histories, examining your mouth, taking a panoramic x-ray and evaluating your symptoms. Sometimes, your dentist might need to refer you to an oral surgeon for an opinion and to perform the wisdom teeth removal.

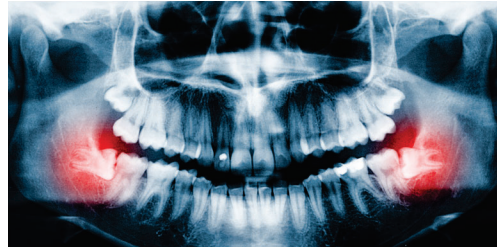


Figure 2. A panoramic x-ray showing two impacted wisdom teeth (highlighted in red) that require removal

What are the treatment options?

After your experienced dentist/oral surgeon assesses your wisdom teeth and other risk factors, he/she will be able to tell you the treatment options. In general, if your impacted wisdom teeth are causing recurrent troubles or are associated with changes in tissues around the wisdom teeth, they need to be surgically removed.

If my wisdom teeth are impacted but not causing any trouble, do I need to have them removed?

The current scientific evidence does not justify removing your disease-free impacted wisdom teeth to prevent future problems. Alternatively, you might ask your dentist to monitor your wisdom teeth every 2-years. This is a cost-effective management plan.

What are the benefits and risks of wisdom tooth surgery?

The benefits of having wisdom teeth removed are to eliminate:

- changes in tissues around the wisdom teeth
- infection
- decay
- gum diseases

and to facilitate:

- orthodontic treatment or jaw correction surgery.

Wisdom tooth surgery might be associated with risks such as:

- Temporary experience of pain, bleeding, infection, swelling, fatigue, tenderness, and limitation of mouth opening.
- Symptoms associated with lower wisdom tooth surgery, might be some numbness to the lower lip or tongue. Most patients recover within 6-months while 1% have permanent lower lip numbness and 0.4% have permanent numbness to the side of their tongue.
- Upper wisdom tooth surgery may cause connection between the mouth and sinus, which can be, on occasion, permanent.

Your surgeon will discuss with you the benefits and risks in detail before shared decision-making and obtaining your consent for the surgery.

Does wisdom teeth surgery hurt?

There are several ways to control pain during and after surgery and you need to make some choices. You can choose between the following types of anesthesia under the guidance of your dentist/oral surgeon:

- Local anesthetic (the same as when you have a dental filling) at the dental practice
- Local anesthetic and sedation at the dental practice
- General anesthesia (GA) at a hospital as a day surgery admission. However, GA never comes without risks and it is associated with an increased cost.

After the surgery, your dentist/oral surgeon will discuss with you any discomfort you may feel and, if it is necessary, prescribe you some strong pain killers to reduce pain and discomfort.

What does wisdom tooth surgery involve?

After the dentist/oral surgeon makes sure that you are completely numb, the dentist/oral surgeon will make a small cut in the gum around the wisdom tooth. To get access, the dentist/oral surgeon might drill the bone around the tooth. Additionally, the dentist/oral surgeon might cut the wisdom tooth into small pieces to remove it. During the procedure, you might experience some vibration and/or pressure. If you feel sore at any point just raise your hand and the surgeon will stop.

After the removal, the dentist/oral surgeon will wash, inspect, clean out and smooth the bone before stitching your gum. Normally, the stitches will dissolve within 1-2 weeks. You will be asked to bite on a moist piece of gauze

for 1 hour to stop the ooze. After the ooze stops and your surgeon checks that you are okay to go home, you will be discharged. You are advised to have someone with you to drive you home after the surgery. If you have your surgery under sedation or general anaesthesia, it is mandatory that you have someone to drive you home.

What should I do after the surgery?

During the first 24 hours after surgery:

- Take some rest (around 3-days) and avoid exercise.
- Avoid eating or drinking things with hot temperatures, instead opt for cold drinks and cold soft food.
- Avoid mouth rinsing, tooth brushing, spitting, sucking motion and smoking so that you do not disturb the blood clot and you give yourself the best chance of healing without subsequent infection.
- Take your pain tablets regularly even if you do not feel sore. Take the first pain killer tablet immediately after the surgery and before the numbness wears-off.
- You might be prescribed some antibiotics. Take them as instructed.
- Normally, if there is no medical reason, blood oozing can be controlled by biting on a moist pad of sterile gauze. If you experience continuous bleeding, you need to contact your dentist/oral surgeon.

After 24 hours:

- Start brushing and flossing your teeth but avoid the surgery area for 72 hours.
- Rinse your mouth using warm salty water mainly after meals and before bedtime.
- Follow-up with your dentist/oral surgeon or, if necessary, use the emergency phone contact number provided by your dentist/oral surgeon following the surgery.
- Take your prescribed medications as instructed.

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FOR FURTHER ENQUIRIES

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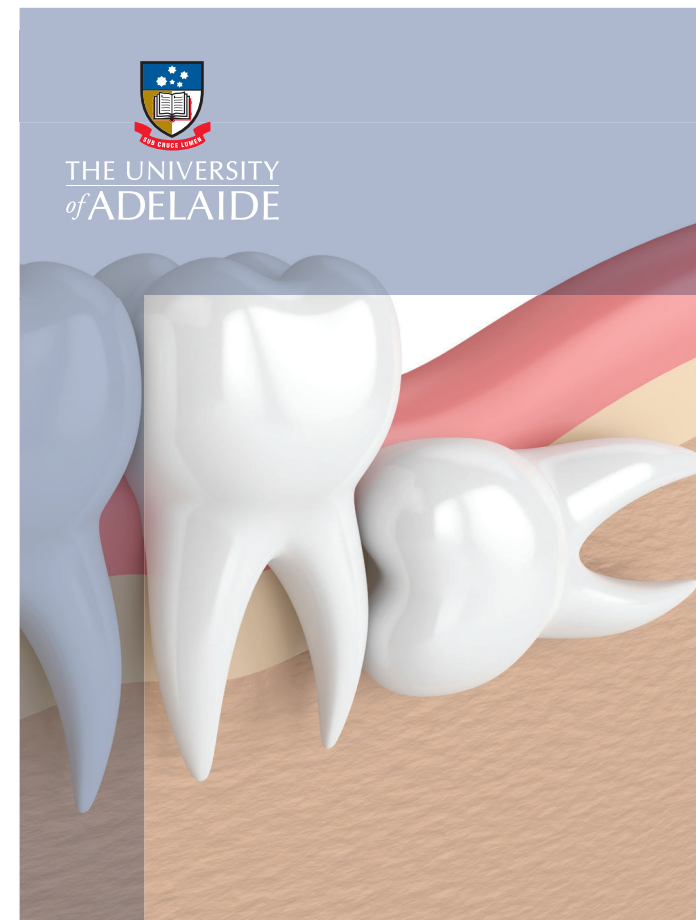
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