

## Wisdom teeth

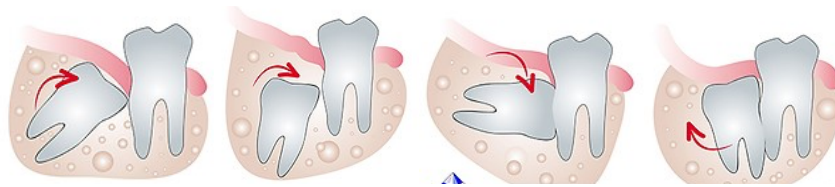
These are all an indication that your wisdom teeth need to be removed

- 🦷 You feel pain in the back of your mouth
- 🦷 You suddenly get headaches
- 🦷 Your jaw feels painful
- 🦷 You start experiencing earache
- 🦷 You feel an itchiness on your gums
- 🦷 You get a salty taste sometimes
- 🦷 The gum at the back of your mouth is painful and red



### Why are my wisdom teeth impacted?

The primary reason is that there is no space in your jaw for the wisdom tooth to erupt. This means that they can end up growing in different directions with little to no hope of ever erupting into your mouth.



### But why do they need to be removed?

- 🦷 There is no space to erupt into your mouth.
- 🦷 For orthodontic purposes.
- 🦷 There may be a small cyst surrounding the tooth – these can steadily increase in size over time.
- 🦷 You may be getting repeat infections because bacteria get trapped between the gum and tooth.
- 🦷 The tooth may be decayed - because of its awkward position which makes it difficult to clean.
- 🦷 The awkward position of your wisdom tooth may cause difficulty in cleaning the tooth ahead of it which can result in that tooth developing decay.
- 🦷 You may need jaw surgery (orthognathic surgery) which requires the wisdom teeth to be removed

### Do I have to remove my wisdom teeth?

If your wisdom teeth erupt normally into your mouth and are functional (they help to chew your food) then they do not need to be removed.

If your wisdom teeth are impacted but are not symptomatic (troubling you) there are different options:

**1. Leave them alone and only remove them when they trouble you –**

- a. The concern with this is that they may start troubling you when you are older and maybe less healthy with 1 or more chronic medical conditions.
- b. Another concern is that; an impacted tooth that doesn't bother you can still develop a cyst or tumour without you knowing until the cyst or tumour is large.

That is why **if this option is chosen, it is absolutely important to keep visiting your dentist regularly** and having a new panorex xray taken at least once a year to reassess your wisdom teeth.

**2. Have them removed because they will never erupt normally into your mouth**

**At what age should I remove my wisdom teeth?**

Wisdom teeth begin to develop between 14-18 years of age, therefore, anytime between the age of 16 – 24 years old is appropriate.

Younger than 16 – for orthodontic purposes or because of pathology.

Older than 24 – the procedure becomes a bit more difficult – fully formed roots, health, longer recovery time, etc..

**How is the procedure done?**

There are 3 settings in which the procedure can be done:

1. **In the surgeons' office** – usually reserved for when only 1 tooth needs to be removed, and if the case is uncomplicated
2. **In a day hospital** – if all of the wisdom teeth are to be removed
3. **In an acute hospital** – this may be necessary if you have certain medical conditions or are using certain chronic medications.

**The procedure usually involves 2-4 people, namely:**

1. Surgeon
2. Anesthetist
3. Surgical assistant
4. Scrub nurse (in theatre) or dental assistant (in rooms)

### For cases done in theatre:

You will need to be admitted on the day of the procedure.

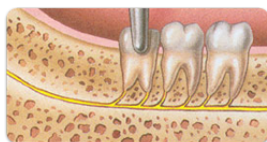
You must not have anything to eat or drink for at least 6 hours before the procedure is done

The anaesthetist will see you in the ward and he will go through a medical questionnaire with you

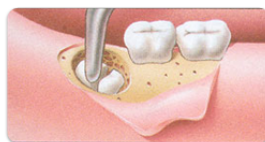
### What happens in theatre?

You will then be taken to the theatre complex and the procedure will begin; this entails the following:

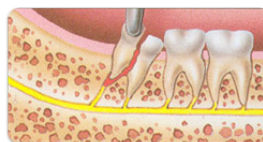
- 🏥 A drip is inserted into your arm so that anesthetic medicine can be given to you.
- 🏥 You will fall off to sleep
- 🏥 A breathing tube will be placed through your nose to help you to breathe during the procedure.
- 🏥 Local anaesthetic is injected into the surgical site(s) to assist with bleeding control and also helps alleviate post-operative pain
- 🏥 The surgery will then begin
  - Cuts are made on the gums to expose the impacted teeth
  - Bone may need to be removed to gain access to the tooth
  - The tooth is either removed as a whole, or it is cut into small pieces and removed (it is better to cut the tooth than to cut away too much bone, as you are losing the tooth anyway)
  - After the tooth is removed, the area is washed
- 🏥 Stitches are then used to close the surgical wounds. These stitches will dissolve or fragment on their own and usually fall out after 10-14 days.
- 🏥 Once all the teeth are out and the procedure is done, the anaesthetist will remove the tube from your nose and wake you up.



Extraction of erupted tooth



Incision with gum flap folded back



Tooth extracted in sections



Wisdom tooth removed and sutures closing the incision

### **What happens when I wake up?**

- 🏥 You will be monitored in a recovery area for a short while (20-30 minutes)
- 🏥 You will have an ice-pack wrapped around the sides of your face – this helps to keep the swelling down and significantly improves the recovery time.

- 🌿 Once you are fully awake you will be given something to eat and drink in the ward
- 🌿 Once your medication has arrived you will be discharged home
- 🌿 You will then have a follow-up with the surgeon 1 week later to make sure that healing is progressing well.

### What medication will I get?

You will get the following:

1. **Antibiotics** – the duration of the course will vary depending on the difficulty of the procedure and also on whether there was infection present or not
2. **Anti-inflammatory medication** – this will help to keep the swelling down and will also help with pain management
3. **Analgesia (pain killers)** – to ensure that you are comfortable
4. **Mouth rinse** – to help keep your mouth clean – you should still brush your teeth; the mouth rinse is just an extra help for the difficult to reach areas
5. **Ice Pack** – technically not a medication, but it does help greatly with keeping facial swelling down

### What is the recovery like?

During the first 3 days – swelling will occur and increase daily (3 days), this is expected, and the best thing to do is to use your medication as prescribed, make sure that you use the pain killers even if you don't feel pain as this will prevent "breakthrough pain". Keep the ice packs on for at least 2 days.

The next 3 days – the swelling will start to settle. You will begin to open your mouth a little easier, the discomfort will start to get less, you may find that you can eat a little easier.

### What can I eat and drink?

Make sure that you stay well hydrated (keep a water bottle with you and take regular sips).

Try to have smaller portions of food, but at shorter intervals (prevent nausea and upset stomach) – so rather 6 small meals than 3 bigger ones.

Try to get a good mix of protein, carbohydrate and fat in your diet (too much sugary food is not good) this will help with healing and recovery- smoothies, soups, pasta, soft fish, shredded chicken. Try to avoid too much sweetened yogurt, custard, jelly and ice cream.

Chewing gum helps as a form of home physiotherapy by getting the muscles to work and thereby getting swelling to settle quicker.

### When can I go back to school/campus/work?

You will most probably be ready to go back to your daily routines after 1 week.

### Can I exercise?

This is not a good idea – your body needs time to recover so wait at least 2 weeks before starting strenuous exercise.

### What other information do I need?

You will need to:

1. **Consent to the surgical procedure** – understand what the procedure entails, understand the risks associated with the surgery and anesthetic.
2. **Understand the costs involved** – these include:
  - a. surgical costs,
  - b. hospital costs (and co-payments if applicable),
  - c. anesthetic costs and
  - d. medication costs –

depending on whether you have a medical aid or not.

Some medical aids will cover in full and others will cover only partially and some will not cover anything.

Your surgeon and their team will be more than happy to assist with the above information.