

## What are Wisdom Teeth?

Wisdom teeth are third molars. Normally people have three permanent molars that develop in each quadrant of the mouth; upper, lower, right and left. The first molars usually grow into the mouth at around six years of age. The second molars grow in at around age 12. The third molars usually will try to grow in at around age 18 to 20 years. Since that is considered to be the age when people become wiser, third molars gained the nickname, "wisdom teeth." Actually, they are no different than any other tooth except that they are the last teeth to erupt, or grow into the mouth. They are just as useful as any other tooth if they grow in properly, have a proper bite relationship, and have healthy gum tissue around them. Unfortunately, this does not always happen.

### What is an impaction?

When wisdom teeth are prevented from erupting into the mouth properly, they are referred to as impacted. Teeth that have not erupted are not necessarily impacted. It may be that it is still too early in someone's dental development, and if time passes they might grow in properly. A

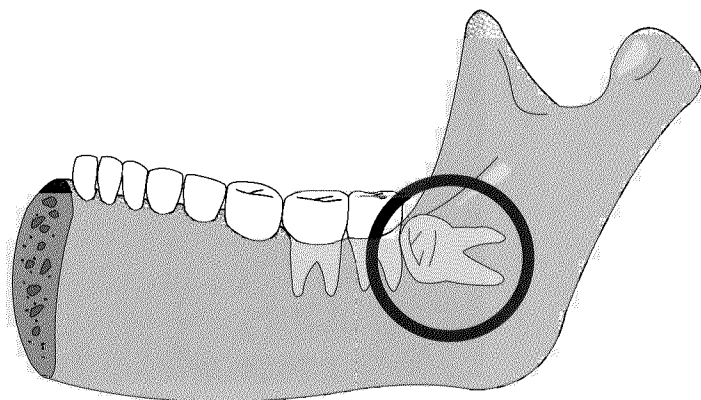
dentist must examine a patient's mouth and his or her x-rays to determine if the teeth are impacted or will not grow in properly. Impacted teeth may cause problems. Impacted teeth can result in infection, decay of adjacent teeth, gum disease or formation of a cyst or tumor from the follicle, which is the tissue which formed the crown of the tooth. Many dentists recommend removal of impacted wisdom teeth to prevent potential problems.

### Erupted wisdom teeth

Erupted wisdom teeth may also need to be removed. The dentist may recommend this if the tooth is non-functional, interfering with the bite, badly decayed, involved with or at risk for periodontal disease, or interfering with restoration of an adjacent tooth. Once again, every case is different and only your dentist can determine if there is a reason for you to have a tooth removed.

### When should wisdom teeth be removed?

The following symptoms may indicate that the wisdom teeth have erupted and surfaced, and should be removed before they become



impacted—meaning, the teeth have surfaced and have no room in the mouth to grow. However, each individual may experience symptoms differently. Symptoms may include:

- pain
- infection in the mouth
- facial swelling
- swelling of the gumline in the back of the mouth

Many oral health specialists will recommend removal of the wisdom teeth, as early removal will help to eliminate problems, such as an impacted tooth that destroys the second molar. Third molar impaction is the most prevalent medical developmental disorder.

### What problems are often associated with impacted third molars?

- bacteria and plaque build-up
- cysts development (a fluid-filled sac)
- tumor development
- infection
- jaw and gum disease

### What is involved in the extraction procedure?

Wisdom tooth extraction involves accessing the tooth through the soft and hard tissue, gently detaching the connective tissue between the tooth and the bone and removing the tooth.

This information was compiled for you by the Academy of General Dentistry. Your dentist cares about long-term dental health for you and your family and demonstrates that concern by belonging to the Academy of General Dentistry. As one of the 36,000 general dentists in the United States and Canada who are members of the Academy, your dentist participates in an ongoing program of professional development and continuing education to remain current with advances in the profession and to provide quality patient treatment. Visit the AGD's website at [www.agd.org](http://www.agd.org). To find a dentist, please call 877/2X-A-Year (877/292-9327). You have permission to photocopy this page and distribute it to your patients.