

What is a Wisdom Tooth Extraction?

Wisdom tooth extraction is a surgical procedure to remove one or more third molars, located at the back of the mouth. These teeth often emerge in late adolescence or early adulthood and can cause various dental problems if they do not have enough space to grow properly.

Why is Extraction Needed?

Wisdom teeth are often removed to prevent or address the following issues:

- **Impaction:** When the tooth is trapped beneath the gums or jawbone, leading to pain and swelling.
- **Overcrowding:** Wisdom teeth may push against existing teeth, causing misalignment.
- **Infection & Gum Disease:** Partially erupted wisdom teeth can trap food and bacteria, leading to infection and inflammation.
- **Cyst Formation:** Fluid-filled sacs can develop around impacted wisdom teeth, potentially damaging the jawbone and nearby teeth.
- **Tooth Decay:** Wisdom teeth are difficult to clean due to their location, making them more susceptible to cavities. They can also lead to decay or bone loss at the tooth directly in front of them.

What are the Risks of Wisdom Tooth Removal?

While wisdom tooth extraction is a common and generally safe procedure, there are potential risks, including:

- **Swelling & Bruising:** Normal side effects that subside within a few days.
- **Nerve Damage:** There is a very small chance of injury to the nerve that gives feeling to the lower lip and tongue. In the vast majority of cases this is only temporary and will subside within a few weeks to months.
- **Infection:** A risk with any surgical procedure, though proper post-care reduces this risk.
- **Dry Socket:** A painful condition where the blood clot at the extraction site is dislodged, exposing the underlying bone.
- **Sinus Complications:** Upper wisdom tooth removal may sometimes affect the maxillary sinuses.
- **Jaw Stiffness:** Temporary difficulty opening the mouth due to swelling and healing.

How Are Wisdom Teeth Extracted?

Wisdom tooth extraction can vary in complexity depending on the position of the teeth. The procedure typically involves the following steps:

1. **Anesthesia Options:** Patients may receive one of the following:
 - **Local Anesthesia:** Numbs the extraction area while the patient remains awake.
 - **Sedation Anesthesia:** Administered through an IV to help the patient relax or sleep lightly during the procedure.
2. **Tooth Removal:**
 - The procedure lasts 30 minutes or less but you will be here a little longer while you recover. Depending on the degree of impaction wisdom teeth may require an incision to expose the underlying bone and tooth. Sometimes removal of bone is required to aid in removal however only a very small amount is removed. The teeth may be sectioned if necessary.
3. **Closing the Surgical Site:**
 - The area is cleaned, and stitches may be placed if necessary.
 - Gauze is applied to control bleeding and help a blood clot form.

What to Expect During Recovery

Recovery from wisdom tooth extraction varies from person to person, but here is a general timeline:

- **First 24 Hours:** Some bleeding, swelling, and discomfort are normal. Rest and avoid strenuous activity.
- **First 3 Days:** Swelling peaks and begins to subside. Pain management and a soft diet are essential.
- **1 Week:** Stitches (if used) may dissolve or require removal. Swelling should significantly decrease.
- **2 Weeks:** Most major healing is complete, but mild discomfort may persist.
- **Several Weeks to Months:** Full healing of the bone and soft tissue continues internally.

During recovery, it's important to follow your surgeon's instructions, maintain good oral hygiene, and attend follow-up visits to ensure proper healing.