

# **Patient Information**

## **Wisdom Tooth Removal**

Oral and Maxillofacial  
Department



## What are wisdom teeth?

The wisdom teeth grow at the back of your gums and are the last teeth to come through. Most people have four wisdom teeth – one in each corner.

## Impacted wisdom teeth

Wisdom teeth usually grow through the gums during the late teens or early twenties. By this time, the other 28 adult teeth are usually in place, so there isn't always enough room in the mouth for the wisdom teeth to grow properly. Due to the lack of space, the wisdom teeth can sometimes emerge at an angle or get stuck and only partially emerge. Wisdom teeth that grow through like this are known as impacted.

## Why are wisdom teeth removed?

Your wisdom teeth don't usually need to be removed if they're impacted and aren't causing any problems. However, sometimes wisdom teeth that have become impacted or haven't fully broken through the surface of the gum can cause dental problems:

- **Tooth decay** - food and bacteria getting trapped around the edge of the wisdom teeth, causing a build-up of plaque, which can lead to tooth decay of the wisdom tooth or adjacent teeth.
- **Gum disease** (also called gingivitis or periodontal disease) – this occurs when plaque releases toxins that irritate your gums, making them red, swollen and painful. Gum disease can also affect the surrounding teeth and the bone around the wisdom teeth.
- **Abscess** – when pus collects around your wisdom teeth and the surrounding tissue due to a bacterial infection.
- **Cysts** - a wisdom tooth that hasn't cut through the gum can develop a cyst (a fluid-filled swelling).

Many of these problems can be treated with treatment such as antibiotics and antiseptic mouthwash, so removing your wisdom teeth is only recommended when other treatment hasn't worked.

## **What are the possible complications?**

As with any procedure, removing your wisdom teeth carries some risks. However, these risks are usually small. They can include:

- **dry socket** – where a blood clot fails to develop in the tooth socket, or if the blood clot becomes dislodged
- **nerve injury** –this can cause temporary or permanent problems, such as pain and numbness
- **infection** – signs include a high temperature, yellow or white discharge from the extraction site, and persistent pain and swelling
- **bleeding**

**You should see your dentist if you have signs of infection after the procedure, or if you're bleeding heavily from the extraction site.**

## **What type of anaesthetic will be used?**

This will be decided between you and the surgeon taking into consideration the difficulty of the extraction.

### **Local anaesthetic (awake)**

This is an injection similar to what you may have had at your dentist's surgery for a filling. The injection takes a couple of minutes to numb the area. You will not feel pain, however you will feel pressure sensations such as pushing. This is normal.

### **General anaesthetic (asleep)**

This can be done on a 'day case' basis for dental extractions, so you will not need to spend the night in hospital. You will not feel any pain during the procedure. You will be given pre-assessment operative advice to help you prepare.

## **Removing the wisdom tooth**

If the tooth hasn't come through the gum, a small cut (incision) will be made in the gum to access it. A small piece of the bone covering the tooth may also need to be removed.

The tooth may be cut into smaller parts to make it easier to remove through the opening. There's less need to make an incision if the tooth has broken through the gum.

You'll feel some pressure just before the tooth is removed. This is because your surgeon needs to widen the tooth socket by rocking the tooth back and forth before taking it out.

Surgery to remove wisdom teeth shouldn't be painful, because the area will be numb. However, if you feel pain during the procedure, tell your dentist or oral surgeon so they can give you more anaesthetic.

## **How long does it take to remove the tooth?**

The length of time it takes to remove the tooth will vary. Simple procedures can take a few minutes, but it can take longer than 20 minutes if it's more complicated.

## **After surgery**

If an incision has been made, dissolving stitches are used to seal the gum.

Your surgeon will place gauze over the site of the extraction and ask you to keep pressure on it by biting your jaws together for up to an hour. This is to allow a blood clot to form in the empty tooth socket. Blood clots are part of the healing process, so try not to dislodge them.

In some cases, antibiotics may be prescribed if you have an ongoing infection.

**Care** - for the 24 hours after having your wisdom tooth removed, you should **avoid**:

- rinsing your mouth out with liquid
- drinking alcohol and smoking
- drinking hot liquids such as tea or soup
- strenuous physical activity

## **Recovering from wisdom tooth removal**

It can take up to two weeks to fully recover after having your wisdom teeth removed.

During this time, you may experience:

- **swelling (inflammation) of your mouth and cheeks** – this will be worse for the first few days, but gradually improves; gently pressing a cold cloth to your face helps to reduce the swelling
- **a stiff, sore jaw** – this should wear off within 7 to 10 days; the skin around your jaw may also be bruised for up to two weeks
- **pain** – this is worse if the extraction was complicated
- **an unpleasant taste in your mouth**
- **tingling or numbness of your face, lips or tongue** (although this is uncommon)

**You should report any excess bleeding, severe pain or any other unusual symptoms to your dentist or oral surgeon immediately.**

## Self-care advice

To reduce pain and aid your recovery, it can be helpful to:

- use painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen (always read and follow the manufacturer's dosage instructions) – there's some evidence to suggest that ibuprofen is the best painkiller to take after having wisdom teeth removed
- avoid strenuous activity and exercise for a few days
- use an extra pillow to support your head at night
- for 24 hours, avoid rinsing, spitting, hot drinks or anything else that may dislodge the blood clots that form in the empty tooth socket, as they help the healing process
- avoid drinking alcohol and smoking
- eat soft or liquid food for a few days and chew with your other teeth
- gently rinse the extraction site with antiseptic mouthwash **after 24 hours**, and repeat this regularly over the next few days – you must also use warm water with a teaspoon of salt as mouthwash, to reduce gum soreness and inflammation

It's usually recommended that you take a day or two off work after having a wisdom tooth removed.

## Returning to normal

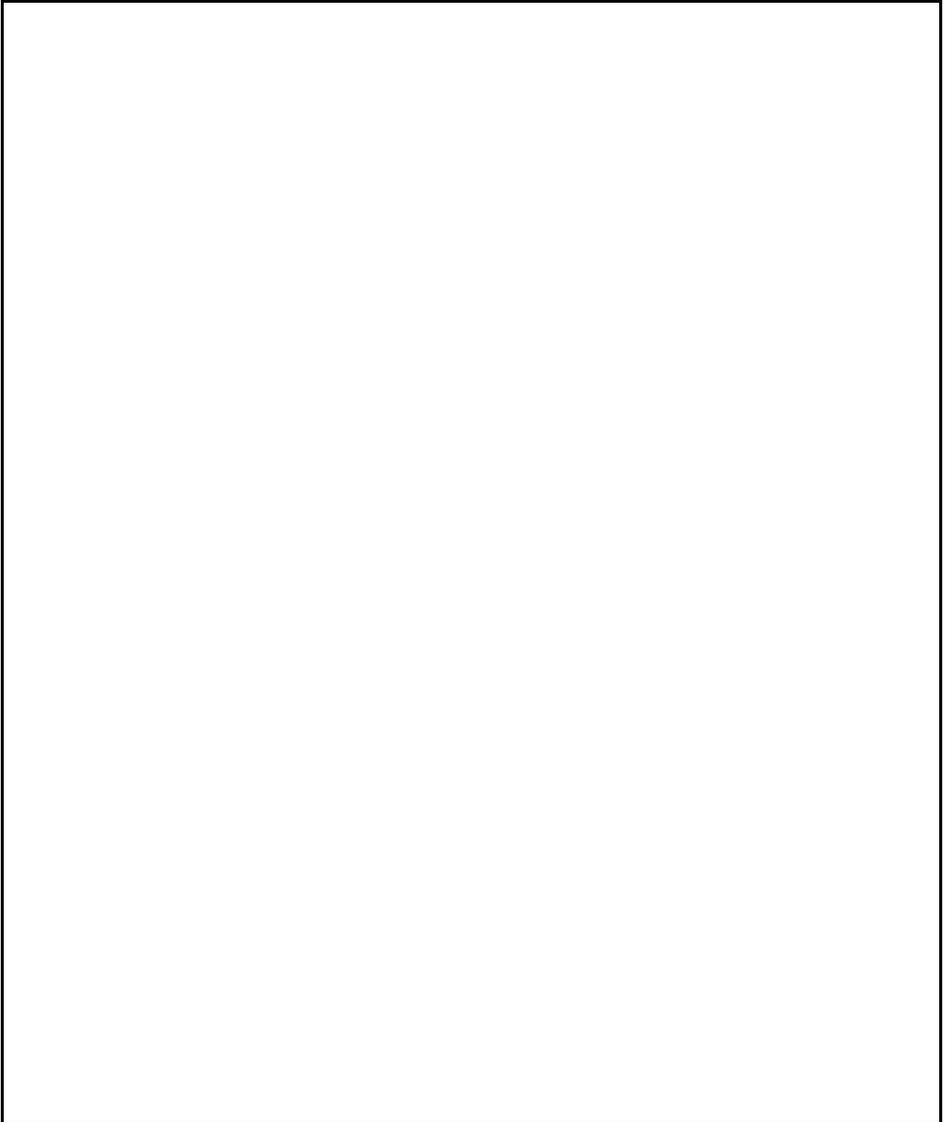
After your wisdom teeth have been removed and any swelling and bruising has disappeared, your mouth and face should return to normal.

You'll usually be able to brush your teeth normally after a few days. Make sure you finish any course of antibiotics you've been given.

A check-up appointment may be arranged for about a week or so after the procedure. At this point, any remaining stitches may be removed.

## Other questions

Please ask any other questions that occur to you. Write down any questions you have in the space below so that you do not forget to ask them when attending clinic.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write down any questions they have for the clinic.

## Contact details

Oral and Maxillofacial Department  
Lister Hospital  
Coreys Mill Lane  
Stevenage  
Hertfordshire  
SG1 4AB

**Telephone:** Lister Department, Stevenage ☎ 01438 284060  
New QEII, Welwyn Garden City ☎ 01707 247575

Monday to Thursday, 8.30am - 5pm  
and Friday, 8.30am - 1pm.

Out of these working hours please contact:  
Luton and Dunstable Hospital out of hours service ☎ **01582 491166**  
and **ask for the maxillofacial doctor on call.**

content supplied by



Date of publication: September 2017

Author: Max Fax Team

Reference: OMF Version: 01

Review Date: September 2020

© East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust

[www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk)

You can request this information in a different format or another language.