

What are wisdom teeth?

Wisdom teeth are the teeth at the very back of the mouth. They tend to come through (erupt) in the late teens or twenties and sometimes cause significant problems.

Your surgeon has recommended removing your wisdom teeth. However, the decision is yours as to whether to proceed with an operation or not. This document will give you enough information about the risks and benefits so you can make an informed decision.

If you have any questions that are not answered by this document, you should ask your surgeon or any member of the healthcare team.

Why do I need my wisdom teeth removing?

Wisdom teeth need removing for a variety of reasons:

- Recurrent infection
- Very bad tooth decay or fracture (broken teeth).
- Other abnormalities with the tooth itself
- Problems with nearby teeth caused by the presence of wisdom teeth
- To allow corrective surgery of orthodontic treatment.

What are the benefits of surgery?

The benefits of surgery are to prevent symptoms returning or to allow nearby teeth to be treated.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Simple painkillers can help control the occasional pain associated with wisdom teeth coming through.

Removing the gum lying over the tooth (operculectomy) or surgical exposure may be carried out in certain cases where wisdom teeth have not totally come through.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

There is a risk of the symptoms getting worse. If removing your wisdom teeth is recommended to allow corrective surgery or other orthodontic treatment, the surgery or treatment will not be possible.

What does the operation involve?

The operation can be performed under either a local or general anaesthetic. A general anaesthetic occasionally involves an over night stay. Your anaesthetist will discuss the options with you and will recommend the best form of anaesthesia for you.

Removing wisdom teeth may involve cutting the gum to uncover the tooth, removing the bone around the tooth and dividing the tooth with a drill. After the operation the gum will be stitched with dissolvable stitches.

What can I do to make the operation a success?

- Lifestyle changes

If you smoke, try to stop smoking now. There is strong evidence that stopping smoking several weeks or more before a general anaesthetic reduces your chances of getting complications.

Stopping smoking also reduces the chances of developing an infection in the wisdom tooth socket.

Keeping your mouth clean will help reduce the risk of infection.

- Medication

You should continue with your normal medication unless you are instructed otherwise.

What risks or complications can occur?

We try to make sure your operation is safe. This may include prescribing medication to reduce the risk of complications. Most operations are successful with few complications. However, every procedure has risks and potential complications. Those most relevant to this operation are listed below. Please discuss them with your doctor if there is anything you do not understand. The risks and complications fall into three categories:

1. Complications of anaesthesia
2. General complications of any operation
3. Specific complications of this operation

Complications of Anaesthesia

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the risks of having an anaesthetic.

General complications of any general operation

- Pain, which occurs with every operation. Efforts will be made to minimise the pain. You will be given medication to control the pain and it is important that you take it as instructed.
- Bleeding, which can occur either during or after surgery.
- Swelling and bruising, which is common and often related to how difficult the removal was.
- Infection, which is rare but may result in pain or slower healing.

Specific complications of this operation

- Not being able to open the mouth fully and jaw stiffness, which may take a few weeks to settle.
- Damage to nerves that connect the lower lip and tongue. This is usually temporary and can take up to six months to recover. Permanent damage is rare (risk is less than 1 in 100).

How soon will I recover?

- In hospital

After the operation we will make sure that any bleeding has stopped. If you have had a general anaesthetic and go home on the same day, you should arrange for a responsible adult to take you home and stay with you for the next 24 hours.

Depending on how difficult it was to remove your teeth and the likelihood of infection, you may be prescribed antibiotics.

You should avoid smoking and make sure you keep your mouth as clean as possible. If you are worried about anything, whether in hospital or at home, ask a member of the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

- Return to normal activities

Most patients return to normal activities within a week of surgery.

Summary

Wisdom teeth can sometimes cause significant problems. Surgery is very safe and effective. However, risks and complications can occur. You need to know about them to help you make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will help with early detection and treatment.

Further information

You can get further information locally from:

- Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) on 01234 355122 ext 5525 or direct dial 01234 795814

Further information is also available from:

- NHS direct n 0845 46 47 and at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- National Institute for Clinical Excellence at www.nice.org.uk
- British Association of Oral and maxillofacial surgeons at www.baoms.org.uk
- www.eidohealthcare.com