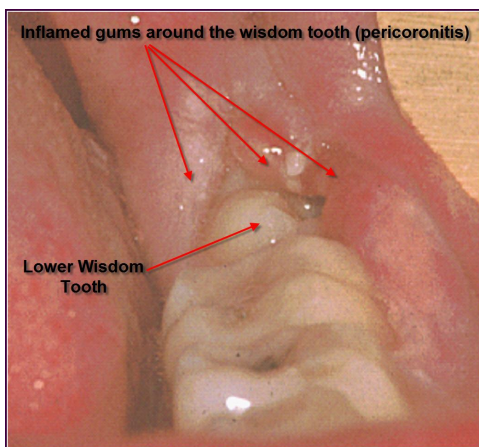


## What are Wisdom teeth?

The wisdom teeth, or third molars, are usually the very last teeth to erupt, usually in the late teens or early twenties. Often there is not enough room for these teeth in the mouth and consequently they do not come through properly. When part or the entire tooth stays under the gums due to another tooth preventing eruption they are referred to as being impacted. It is these that sometimes cause pain or other problems.

## Why would I need treatment?

Generally wisdom teeth, even those that are impacted should not be removed unless significant problems are caused. It has been thought in the past that they should be removed even if they are not causing problems just in case they should in the future. If they do not cause any problems there is no need for their removal.



Reasons for removing wisdom teeth include:

- Untreatable decay in the tooth.
- Damage being caused to the tooth in front.
- Recurrent infection from the surrounding gum.
- Cysts or tumours forming around the tooth.
- Gum disease around the tooth.

## NICE

The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) has recommended guidelines for the removal of wisdom teeth in the UK.

Impacted wisdom teeth that are healthy should not be removed. This is because there is no research that any health benefit is gained; there is the risk of nerve damage, bleeding, and infection and in rare cases, death.

These healthy teeth should be looked at on a regular basis at the patient's usual dentist. Only teeth that fit the criteria outlined earlier should be removed.

## What does treatment involve 8's

Removal of wisdom teeth is one of the most common operations carried out in the UK. Removal of wisdom teeth is carried out under:

- Local anaesthetic.
- Local anaesthetic with sedation
- General anaesthetic.

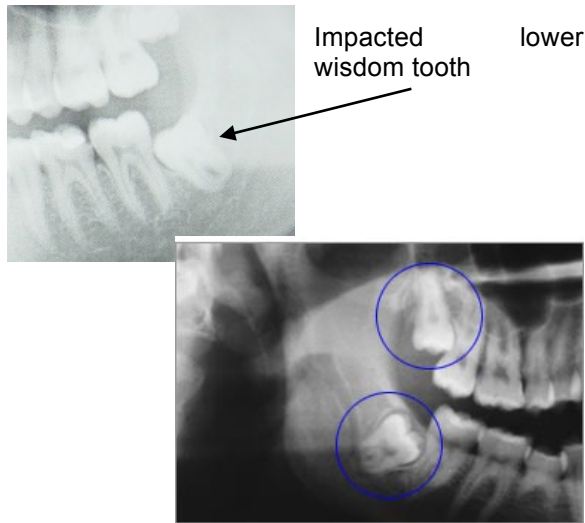
The type of anaesthetic would depend on the patient and the complexity of the operation. Your medical history may limit the options of anaesthetic type.

Local anaesthetic (numbing the area with an injection) is considered the safest however the patient is fully aware of what is going on – something that does not appeal to many patients.

General anaesthetic (where the patient is unconscious) is often requested by patients, however it carries the greatest risks, possibly death in extreme cases. It is only really suited to the most difficult cases where multiple teeth are being removed.

Local anaesthetic with sedation is often a good compromise, the patient is generally unaware of what is going on, feels very relaxed, recovery is quick and there are minimal risks for most patients. It is particularly suited to removal of difficult or very impacted teeth.

In order to remove the tooth it is often necessary to expose the tooth by cutting the gum and removing some bone. The tooth may need to be cut into pieces to be removed. The gum would then be stitched whilst it heals up – usually 1 to 2 weeks.



### Possible problems?

Although most complications are uncommon it is important that the patient is aware of what could occur.

- Swelling in the face and around the jaw. It is usual to expect some swelling; this may take up to two weeks to subside.
- Pain, bruising – pain can be as a result of a “dry socket” where the clot is lost and bone exposed. It can be acutely painful but can easily be treated. Smoking is the major risk factor.
- Bleeding.
- Infection – Although uncommon this may occur and require antibiotics to resolve. Inability to open the mouth fully. This may be stiffness in the muscles and jaw.

- However other complications can occur including infection of the socket. This may need to be cleaned and prescribed antibiotics. This is more likely if you are a smoker.
- The proximity of the lower wisdom teeth to several nerves means that there is a possibility that the nerves may be damaged or bruised during removal of the tooth. This can result in numbness of the lip, chin or tongue or problems with taste. In most cases this will last no more than a week (1 in 10 people) , however, in some rare cases this may be permanent. (Less than 1 in 100)
- Sinus complications – Occasionally with upper wisdom teeth the roots lie close to the sinus cavity. Very occasionally removal can result in an opening into the sinus that will need to be treated.
- Other uncommon complications can include damage to other teeth, fracture of the bones of the jaw.

It is important to keep the area clean whilst healing, by adhering to the advice given. Doing so will reduce the discomfort and prevent infection.

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# Wisdom Teeth



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