



## **YOUR WISDOM TEETH**

### **WHAT ARE WISDOM TEETH?**

If your teenager is 13 years or older, then he/she probably has most of his permanent or adult teeth. The last of the permanent teeth to appear are called third molars or wisdom teeth. They usually begin to erupt, pushing their way through the gums, between ages 17 and 21. Wisdom teeth that are healthy and properly positioned can be an asset. For some teens, however, one or more of the four wisdom teeth may be missing, having never formed. In most cases, wisdom teeth remain impacted, trapped beneath the gum and bone and against the teeth in front of them. They may partially erupt because the jaw can be crowded by other permanent teeth. The partially erupted teeth may tilt sideways and may cause damage to adjacent teeth. Regular dental checkups are important not just for having your teeth cleaned but for allowing your dentist to track the progress and condition of your adult teeth. After examining your mouth and taking X-rays, your dentist can evaluate your wisdom teeth and discuss whether or not they should be removed.

### **WHY ARE THEY REMOVED?**

Because they are so far back in the mouth, wisdom teeth often are not needed for chewing and they are difficult to keep clean and prone to infection. Your dentist may recommend the early removal of impacted wisdom teeth to prevent against the potential complications of:

1. The wisdom tooth partially erupts through the gum. This creates an opening where bacteria may enter and cause infection. Pain, swelling and jaw stiffness may result.
2. The impacted wisdom tooth may continue growing without having enough room, which may damage adjacent teeth.
3. A fluid-filled sac (cyst) or tumor may form on or near the impacted tooth, destroying surrounding bone or tooth roots.

## **WHAT CAN I EXPECT?**

Before surgery, the dentist explains what to expect and gives instructions to follow. Dress comfortably for your appointment, wearing loose clothing. Arrange for someone to be with you after your dental visit.

Extractions can be performed under local anesthesia or novacaine. Your dentist can discuss what type of anesthesia and pain or sedation medication would be available and suitable for you.

Following surgery, you may experience some swelling and discomfort, which is part of the normal healing process. Cold compresses can help decrease the swelling. Medication prescribed by your dentist also can help relieve discomfort. You may be instructed to drink only clear liquids after the surgery until a time when you can begin to eat soft foods.

Some people experience numbness or tingling in their face or jaw after surgery. Normal sensation usually returns in a period of time. A condition called dry socket occasionally occurs when the blood clot breaks down sooner than normal. If this happens, your dentist may place a special dressing in the tooth's socket to protect it as it heals.

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

Talk to your dentist about any concerns or questions you have about the procedure. It's especially important to tell your dentist, before surgery is scheduled, of any illness that you have and of all medications that you are taking whether they are prescription or over-the-counter drugs. If your family dentist refers you to a specialist, they will work together to provide you with the best and most efficient care.

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