

Frequently Asked Questions About the Removal of Third Molars (Wisdom Teeth)



This brochure is intended for your general knowledge.

This information is not a substitute for visiting a dentist nor does this information replace advice given to you by your physician or dentist.

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What are third molars?

Third molars, also known as “wisdom teeth,” typically appear in the mouth between the ages of 17 and 25. Most people have four third molars (two in the top arch of teeth and two in the bottom), but some people may have just one, two, three, or even none. When these teeth break through the gum, they are said to have “erupted.”¹

What is an impacted third molar?

A third molar is considered to be impacted when it fails to erupt or only partially erupts through the gum tissue. Impacted third molars are very common and often cause no pain or problems. It’s important to remember that whether they are erupted or impacted, it is possible for wisdom teeth to cause problems if they are not properly cared for by brushing, flossing, and having regular visits to your dentist.²

Should I have my third molars removed?

You should discuss your options with your dentist before making any decisions regarding your third molars. Depending on the current state of your third molars (such as whether or not they are impacted, the position in which they are erupting, and how they may be affecting the teeth adjacent to your third molars), your dentist will recommend the best course of action for you. Your dentist may also refer you to an oral surgeon, a dentist who specializes in removal of third molars, for further evaluation.

What does the American Dental Association say about the removal of third molars?

There are different schools of thought surrounding the removal (extraction) of third molars. According to the American Dental Association, the “extraction of wisdom teeth is generally recommended when:

- Wisdom teeth only partially erupt. This leaves an opening for bacteria to enter around the tooth and cause an infection. Pain, swelling, jaw stiffness and general illness can result.
- There is a chance that poorly aligned wisdom teeth will damage adjacent teeth.
- A cyst (fluid-filled sac) forms, destroying surrounding structures such as bone or tooth roots.”³

Questions to ask your dentist about the removal of third molars:

1. Do I have third molars, and if so, how many?
2. Why should I or shouldn't I have my third molar(s) removed?
3. What are the possible side effects and risks of having my third molar(s) removed?
4. What are the risks if I choose to keep my third molar(s)?
5. If I choose to keep my third molars, what changes should I make to my oral care routine?

¹ American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. "Wisdom Teeth," https://www.aaoms.org/images/uploads/pdfs/Ebook_Wisdom_Teeth_R.pdf. Accessed 04/19/2018.

² MedLine Plus Medical Encyclopedia. "Impacted Tooth," <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001057.htm>. Accessed 04/19/2018.

³ American Dental Association. "Wisdom Teeth," <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/w/wisdom-teeth>. Accessed 04/19/2018.

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