



THE

Ins & Outs

— OF WISDOM TEETH —



Consider the old adage, "With age, comes wisdom." Yet, at the "age" when "wisdom" teeth typically begin to erupt, people have hardly gained enough life experience to be considered "wise." As humans have evolved, the need for wisdom teeth, at least on a functional level, has been extinguished. In fact, some individuals are born with fewer than four wisdom teeth, or third molars to which they are officially referred, or even without these teeth at all. Wisdom teeth are not needed for the chewing function and are often tilted, rotated, or otherwise malpositioned in the mouth.



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FACTS CONCERNING

Wisdom Teeth

The following facts can provide some insight into better understanding wisdom teeth and their presence in the mouth:

- Wisdom teeth usually erupt between the ages of 17 and 25.
- Ninety percent of individuals have a minimum of one wisdom tooth that is impacted (still within the gum and/or bone tissue), according to the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons.
- These are the most common teeth to be congenitally missing.
- The frequent malpositioning of these teeth often lead to the decay and disease of adjacent teeth and their surrounding gum tissues.
- Partial eruption of wisdom teeth is common, significantly increasing the risk of decay and disease within these teeth and the surrounding gum tissue.
- Even if fully erupted, wisdom teeth are difficult to maintain and keep clean.

Why Are Wisdom Teeth Often Extracted?

There are a myriad of reasons as to why third molars may need to be extracted, but some are more common than others. The most common reasons for a wisdom tooth extraction are as follows:

- Presence of decay on a wisdom tooth
- Presence of periodontal disease involving a wisdom tooth
- Presence of cysts or other anomalies surrounding a wisdom tooth
- Impinging upon adjacent teeth, increasing the risk of or causing infection
- Chronic food trap caused by the positioning of a wisdom tooth
- Insufficient space to allow for proper eruption of wisdom teeth

The timing of wisdom teeth extractions is very important. Tooth roots in younger individuals have not yet fully developed, rendering the extraction of these teeth often easier and posing a decreased risk of complications.

In reality, most wisdom teeth have to be extracted. Few individuals have enough room in the jaw for the full eruption and maintenance of healthy wisdom teeth. Fortunately, any wisdom teeth that require extraction can be removed at once, allowing for a single healing period.



RISKS OF LEAVING

Wisdom Teeth

— IN THE JAW —

For some individuals, leaving the wisdom teeth unerupted in the jaw bone causes no harm, especially when the positioning does not appear to have the potential to impact neighboring teeth. However, leaving these teeth in place can increase the risk of jaw bone cysts and tumors, damage to adjacent teeth, and acute or chronic infections. If wisdom teeth are left impacted in the bone, they should be monitored with x-rays periodically to evaluate for the development of cysts and other conditions.