

## **Wisdom Teeth**

The term Wisdom teeth came from the idea that a person reached the age of wisdom at 18 years. Wisdom teeth (also called third molars) usually erupt between the ages of 16 to 18 and are fully developed by age 22 or 23. They are the last group of permanent teeth to move into a person's mouth and are located behind the 12 year molars. Wisdom teeth present a problem when the jaw is not sufficiently long to accommodate them, leaving them trapped, or 'impacted' within the jaw bone. This circumstance is known as impacted wisdom teeth and the term applies equally to wisdom teeth that are only able to partially erupt.

## **Indicators for Removal of Wisdom Teeth**

Episodic soreness of the area surrounding an impacted wisdom tooth could be the result of naturally occurring bacteria in the mouth having worked its way into the surrounding gum tissue and bone, resulting in an infection. This soreness can mistakenly be taken as being caused by the wisdom teeth erupting. If left untreated, surrounding bone and tooth roots of nearby teeth could be at risk as well.

Other indicators are headaches, earaches, pain in the face neck and throat, and even other teeth. Development of cysts can occur when sacs and follicles that are residual to the tooth development fill with fluid. These cysts can destroy bone that surrounds adjacent teeth. Left untreated, there are rare cases where cysts develop into tumors, which then require significantly more extensive procedures for removal.

## **Advantages of early wisdom tooth removal**

Early removal of impacted wisdom teeth before the roots are full formed is preferential to waiting until symptoms develop. The surgical procedure and the recovery time can be more involved once the teeth become symptomatic than if they are removed electively. As the teeth develop, the roots lengthen, and they become more firmly anchored in the jaw. As a person ages, it becomes more difficult to remove the teeth.

## **Surgical Removal**

Dental extractions require some anesthesia. As part of the pre surgical consultation anesthesia options are discussed and an appropriate plan is decided upon by you and your surgeon. Anesthesia techniques that our office uses include:

- Local anesthesia consisting of an injection which numbs or freezes the surgical area.
- Oral pre-medication taken by mouth prior to the procedure to relieve anxiety.
- Nitrous Oxide, also called 'laughing gas', administered by mask over the nose to assist relaxation.
- Intravenous (IV) sedation given through an IV to relieve anxiety.
- General anesthesia given through an IV that allows the patient to sleep through the procedure.