

# Wisdom Teeth

## care and treatment

### Third Molars or “Wisdom Teeth”

Wisdom teeth are the third molars which usually appear between the ages of 17 and 24. If there is ample room for the wisdom teeth they will come through normally. Sometimes not all 4 are present or they may not come through properly.

Often wisdom teeth come through at an angle and in other cases they may not erupt at all if they are growing in the wrong direction. The teeth may be vertically impacted, angled forwards or backwards or horizontally impacted (not very common).

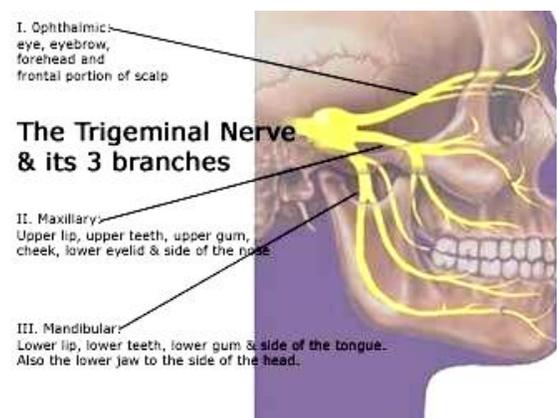
To help diagnose the presence and/or problems with wisdom teeth a special x-ray called an **OPG** (Orthopantomogram) is often taken. This x-ray shows the lower half of the skull – the jaws, teeth and sinus.

This x-ray will show how the wisdom teeth are growing and erupting and where the **facial nerves** are near them.

### Example of an OPG film



Impacted wisdom teeth



### The Trigeminal Nerve & its 3 branches

I. Ophthalmic:  
eye, eyebrow,  
forehead and  
frontal portion of scalp

II. Maxillary:  
Upper lip, upper teeth, upper gum,  
cheek, lower eyelid & side of the nose

III. Mandibular:  
Lower lip, lower teeth, lower gum & side of the tongue.  
Also the lower jaw to the side of the head.

### Care of Impacted Teeth

When the tooth has not fully come through the gum, it may still be covered somewhat by a flap of gum. Being so far back in the mouth, the wisdom teeth are hard to keep clean especially around this gum flap. Debris and bacteria can accumulate around and under this gum flap. This can cause an infection called ‘pericoronitis’. Untreated, this infection could become severe.

### Symptoms of Pericoronitis

- Swelling
- Redness
- Difficulty opening mouth
- Bad odour
- Bad taste
- Pain in the area, jaw and neck
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### Special Care

When a toothbrush is not sufficient, the dentist may recommend using a plastic syringe to flush under the gum flap – often with salty water or hydrogen peroxide.

### Extraction of Wisdom Teeth

Often the best way to treat wisdom teeth that have not come through properly is to take them out. This is especially so if they have become infected.

Depending on how the teeth are positioned in the jaw, the extraction can be simple and straight forward. In the case of some impacted teeth, a surgical approach may be required.

If your dentist feels that the extraction may not be simple, they may refer you to a specialist – **Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeon** – to have the extractions.

The dentist will also assess if there is a risk of facial nerve damage, especially with lower wisdom teeth. In that case, the Oral Surgeon is the best option for the extraction.

The extractions may be done under a local anaesthetic or more commonly for all 4 teeth, under a general anaesthetic.