

# The scoop on your wisdom teeth

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**W**isdom teeth, also known as third molars, are the teeth in your mouth that are the last to erupt. Typically they begin erupting at around 17 or 18 years of age and are fully erupted by age 21. If there is adequate room for your third molars AND you are able to keep them clean, you don't need to do anything about them. However, since the third molar teeth are the furthest back, they are also more likely than the other teeth to have problems with decay and periodontal disease. Cystic development can also occur with asymptomatic impacted third molars, which would require removal and biopsy. Everyone's clinical situation is different.



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It is essential that the wisdom teeth be evaluated by X-ray at least by the age of 12. The ideal time for wisdom tooth removal is before the age of 25, typically between the ages of 12 and 20, when the roots are not fully developed. Surgery at this time makes the extractions easier and the recovery time shorter.

Risks involved with third molar removal at the proper time are small. However, there is a nerve in the lower jaw that supplies feeling to the lower lip that can potentially be involved anytime a lower third molar is removed. Therefore, numbness in the lower lip is either a temporary or permanent potential complication. The incidence is not very common.

There is also a small risk of leaving a hole in the sinus cavity in the upper jaw, depending on the growth and position of the roots of the upper third molars. If there is a hole, it can be surgically repaired, either at the initial procedure or later. There is also the potential for decay in the adjacent teeth depending on the position and angulation of the wisdom teeth. All of these complications are greatly reduced in frequency if the teeth are removed at the proper time.

Bad bacteria and chronic inflammation can exist around third molars that have no symptoms and can move forward to the area of the second molars, which are much more important from a functional standpoint. A thorough examination by a general dentist or and oral surgeon can determine if inflammation is present and if removal of the third molars is necessary.

Each patient as a teenager should have an X-ray to evaluate the position and development of the wisdom teeth. If there is any question, an oral and maxillofacial surgeon should evaluate the X-ray and the patient to determine if removal of the wisdom teeth is indicated. Problems of this nature are better taken care of before they occur rather than after.

**Wisdom teeth, or third molars, are more likely to have problems than any other teeth**

## References

Sources: American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons; Ray White, DDS, PhD. Third Molar Study: University of North Carolina.

