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Wisdom Teeth

What are wisdom teeth and why are they operated on?

Adult teeth normally come through from the age of 6 upwards, with the wisdom teeth being the last to arrive (usually between the ages of 18 and 24 years). Sometimes as wisdom teeth come through they cause problems.

The term used to describe wisdom teeth that don't come through normally is **impacted wisdom teeth**.

Two reasons for this are a lack of space, or other teeth being in the way.

For most people, impacted wisdom teeth cause no problems at all, but some people can suffer problems such as inflammation of the surrounding gum, a higher risk of tooth decay, gum disease in other teeth, and possibly problems with teeth in later life.

Removal of wisdom teeth is one of the most common operations carried out in the UK.

Impacted wisdom teeth have sometimes been removed whether or not they were causing problems. There is no reliable evidence to suggest that operating on impacted wisdom teeth that are NOT causing problems has any benefit for the patient. In fact, every operation has some risk.

What is recommended about the removal of wisdom teeth?

Based on evidence (NICE guidelines), it is recommended that impacted wisdom teeth that are free from disease (healthy) should NOT be operated on.

There are two reasons for this, the first being that there is no reliable research that this practice benefits patients. Also, patients who do have healthy wisdom teeth removed are being exposed to the risks of surgery. These can include nerve damage, damage to other teeth, infection, bleeding and rarely, death.

Only patients who have diseased wisdom teeth, or other problems associated with the wisdom teeth, should have their wisdom teeth removed. Your dentist or oral surgeon will be aware of the sort of disease or conditions, which would require you to have surgery.

Examples include untreatable tooth decay, abscesses, cysts or tumours, disease of the tissues around the tooth or if the tooth is in the way of other surgery.

What should I do?

If you or a member of your family or someone you care for are having problems with their wisdom teeth you should discuss this with your general dentist or oral surgeon.

The information provided on wisdom teeth in this brochure is provided by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), UK.