



Timing for Wisdom Tooth Removal

When is the right time to get your wisdom teeth extracted?

A Brief History of Wisdom Teeth

Anthropologists believe that wisdom teeth, the third set of molars that typically come in between ages 17-25, were needed by our prehistoric ancestors in order to adequately chew the nuts, roots, rough plants, and seeds that made up the bulk of their diet. As their teeth broke, wore, or fell out, the wisdom teeth were there as back-up, replacing the damaged teeth and allowing them to continue chewing their tough food.

As humans adapted to their environment, started cooking their food (which made it softer), wisdom teeth weren't as necessary to chew food. As humans evolved, their brains also started growing and jaws started shrinking to accommodate the space needed.

Nowadays, most people find that there just isn't enough space in their jaw for their wisdom teeth to come all the way in, so they must face the decision about whether or not they should be removed.

When Should I Get My Wisdom Teeth Removed?

Some are lucky enough to have enough space in their jaws for their third molars to grow straight in like any other teeth, others are not so lucky. Without adequate space in the jaw, wisdom teeth may grow in crooked, pushing on other teeth, or may not completely grow in at all, remaining impacted (partially or fully below the gum, partially or fully still in the jaw bone). Partially impacted wisdom teeth, where only part of the tooth is showing above the gum, are especially difficult to clean, so are prone to cavities and infection.

For most people, wisdom teeth start coming in between ages 17-23, however, your dentist will provide an opinion about if and when these teeth should be removed. The dentist will make a recommendation based on patient age, pain level, level of decay, gum disease, whether cysts or tumors are present, and whether there has been recurring gum infection around the tooth in question. Dentists may sometimes recommend extraction before the patient is even experiencing issues, if they believe the wisdom teeth will cause issues in the future. Talk to your dentist if you think your wisdom teeth should be removed - they will let you know if they should be pulled and when.



Wisdom Teeth and Insurance

Insurance coverage for wisdom tooth removal highly depends on several factors:

- Difficulty of extraction
- Level of tooth impaction
- Place of service (dental clinic vs. outpatient hospital)
- Level of anesthesia used

Some insurance plans require the dental office to submit a prior authorization for some procedures, like removal of impacted teeth or general anesthesia. Check with your insurance plan before your procedure to confirm your benefits.



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