# Wisdom Teeth Pain: Common Causes Explained | Core Dental

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## Details:

Wisdom tooth pain is often caused by impaction, which means the tooth does not have enough room to come through properly and may sit at an angle or stay partly under the gum. Other causes include a tooth erupting beyond its normal position, gum inflammation around a partly erupted tooth (pericoronitis), and gum disease caused by food and bacteria building up at the back of the mouth. At Core Dental our dentists can examine the area, take X-rays where appropriate and explain your options.

## What is the most common cause of wisdom tooth pain?

The most common cause is impaction. An impacted wisdom tooth is one that is coming in sideways, or is held back, because there is not enough space for it to emerge normally. It can press on neighbouring teeth, irritate the gum and make the area tender. Not every impacted tooth causes symptoms, so an examination and, where appropriate, an X-ray help your dentist see what is happening beneath the gum.

## What is over-eruption of a wisdom tooth?

Over-eruption happens when a wisdom tooth erupts beyond its normal position. This can affect the way your teeth meet, giving a bad bite, and the erupted tooth can be quite sharp, which may injure the cheek or gum or the teeth around it. If you notice an ulcer, a sore cheek or a change in your bite near the back of your mouth, mention it to your dentist.

## Why does gum disease develop around wisdom teeth?

The back of the mouth is naturally difficult to keep clean, and wisdom teeth make it harder because access for cleaning is so restricted. Food can build up around the tooth and bacteria can multiply, leading to inflamed, sore or bleeding gums and, in some people, gum disease. Good brushing, cleaning between the teeth where you can reach, and regular check-ups and cleans help. You can read more about keeping your gums healthy .

## What is pericoronitis?

Pericoronitis is a mild to moderate inflammation of the gum around a partly erupted wisdom tooth. Part of the tooth may be covered by a flap of gum, where food and bacteria can become trapped. The result can be swelling, tenderness and a low-grade infection. The soft tissue around a partly erupted tooth, including the gum and the tissue surrounding the crown of the tooth, can become inflamed and cause pain and discomfort. Please see a dentist promptly if you have swelling, a bad taste or pain that does not settle.

## What does wisdom tooth removal involve?

Wisdom teeth sit at the very back of the mouth, which can make removal more involved, and they are located close to nerves that supply feeling to the lip, cheek, gum and tongue. Dentistry has become more patient-friendly over time, and removal is intended to relieve the pain and other problems caused by the tooth. As with any procedure, there are risks, and your dentist will explain them before you decide.

Possible complications include bleeding, swelling, infection, bruising and dry socket, most of which are temporary.

Damage to a nearby nerve can cause temporary or, rarely, permanent tingling or numbness in the area the nerve supplies.

Removing a tooth can occasionally affect neighbouring teeth, which may then need treatment such as a filling, onlay or crown.

Our team aims to reduce the chance of complications through careful assessment, and where a case is complex we may refer you to a registered specialist such as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon. Please ask at your appointment which option applies to you.

## When should you see a dentist about wisdom tooth pain?

Please book an appointment if you have ongoing pain at the back of your mouth, swelling, difficulty opening your mouth, a bad taste, or gums that bleed or are sore around the back teeth. Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms. For severe pain or swelling, contact your Core Dental practice promptly on 13 13 16, and we reserve emergency appointments where possible.

## How can we help?

If wisdom tooth pain is troubling you, our team at any of our nine Core Dental practices can examine the area and explain your options. Call 13 13 16 or book online. We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans. See our page on wisdom tooth removal , or read how you might recover from wisdom tooth extraction .

## How many teeth do we get, and when do they arrive?

Most people have two sets of teeth over the span of their life: baby teeth, more correctly known as primary teeth, of which there are 20, followed by adult teeth, or permanent teeth, of which there are 32.

When teeth first push through the gums we call this eruption. The first molars, located towards the back of the mouth, are among the first permanent teeth to erupt, usually around the age of 6 or 7 years. The molars do not replace any of the baby teeth, which is how the count rises from 20 teeth in childhood to 32 in adulthood.

With no other teeth in their way, the first and second molars, the latter arriving between 11 and 13 years, generally have plenty of room to break through.

## When do wisdom teeth erupt, and why are they called that?

Your third molars, also known as the wisdom teeth, are the last of the adult teeth to erupt, generally arriving between the ages of 17 and 21. The name reflects the assumption that one will be older and wiser than when any of the other teeth appeared.

They are sometimes referred to as the eights, because each wisdom tooth is the eighth and final tooth in each of the four corners of the mouth.

By the time these teeth arrive, all of the other adult teeth are well and truly out, and that timing is the source of most wisdom tooth trouble. There is often insufficient room left for the eights, which is what leads to impaction and the complications that follow it.

## Why are wisdom teeth so hard to keep clean?

Because of where they sit, and the figures on this are striking.

Wisdom teeth are so far back in the mouth that they generally prove very difficult to clean properly. Fewer than 2 per cent of adults aged 65 maintain their third molars free from cavities or gum disease. That is not a statement about any individual's brushing so much as about access: a toothbrush reaches the eights at an awkward angle, and floss reaches between them with difficulty.

This is why wisdom teeth are assessed at check-ups even when they are not hurting, and why a wisdom tooth that is partly covered by gum is watched more closely than one that has erupted cleanly.

## Do we actually need wisdom teeth?

Given the trouble they cause, it is perhaps ironic that wisdom teeth are generally considered unnecessary from a functional perspective, meaning for chewing and speaking.

The third molars are thought to be a remnant from a time when humans had larger jaws and needed an extra molar in each corner of the mouth to break down tough plant food, which aided digestion. Jaw size has reduced since; the number of teeth in the developmental plan has not kept pace.

This is also why removing a wisdom tooth does not leave a functional gap in the way that losing a first or second molar does, and why replacement is not normally considered after wisdom tooth extraction.

## Why is wisdom tooth removal more complicated than other extractions?

Two reasons: access and anatomy.

Given their location at the very back of the mouth, wisdom teeth are relatively complicated to remove, simply because reaching and manipulating them is harder than with a tooth further forward. They are also situated close to the inferior alveolar nerve and the lingual nerve, which supply sensation to the lip, cheek, gum and tongue.

Dentistry has become more sophisticated over time, and removal of wisdom teeth is a more predictable and more comfortable procedure than it once was. That does not make it a minor procedure, and the planning, including imaging to establish where the roots sit in relation to those nerves, is the part that reduces the risk.

## What complications can arise from wisdom tooth removal?

In rare instances, complications can arise. They include:

excessive haemorrhaging, meaning blood loss

postoperative oedema, meaning swelling, and infection

bruising

dry socket

Most of these are temporary. Two further risks are worth understanding specifically.

Damage to either of the nerves mentioned above can result in temporary or permanent paraesthesia, meaning pins and needles, or anaesthesia, meaning numbness, affecting the lip, cheek, gum and tongue on the corresponding side of the face. Any extraction also has the potential to damage the adjacent teeth, which may then require restoration with treatments such as crowns, onlays or fillings.

Your treating practitioner will explain which of these risks apply to your own case, based on how your wisdom teeth are positioned.

## Why do we refer wisdom teeth to a registered specialist?

To reduce the risk of exactly the complications described above.

At Core Dental we refer our wisdom teeth patients to registered specialists such as oral and maxillofacial surgeons. Their training is substantial: 4 to 5 years of general dentistry, followed by 4 to 6 years completing a degree in medicine, the same degree as a medical general practitioner, before specialist surgical training.

Oral and maxillofacial surgery is one of the recognised specialist divisions of the Dental Board of Australia, and you can confirm any practitioner's specialist registration on the AHPRA register at ahpra.gov.au. You can read about our oral and maxillofacial surgery and wisdom tooth extraction services.

## Frequently asked questions

### *Why does my wisdom tooth hurt when it is coming through?*

A wisdom tooth that is coming through can press on nearby teeth and irritate the gum, particularly when there is not enough room. Food and bacteria may also collect around it. A dentist can examine the area and explain the likely cause.

### *Do all wisdom teeth need to be removed?*

No. Wisdom teeth that are healthy, fully through and easy to clean may not need treatment. Teeth that cause pain, repeated infection or damage to other teeth are more likely to be recommended for removal. Your dentist will assess your own situation.

### *Can a gum flap over a wisdom tooth cause pain?*

Yes. A flap of gum over a partly erupted wisdom tooth can trap food and bacteria, causing swelling and tenderness known as pericoronitis. A dentist can clean the area and advise on what to do next.

### *Is wisdom tooth removal painful?*

We use local anaesthetic or other approaches as appropriate, so you should not feel pain during the procedure. Some soreness, swelling and tenderness afterwards is usual and varies between people. Your dentist will explain aftercare and what to expect.

### *Can wisdom teeth cause jaw pain?*

They can contribute for some people, particularly when there is infection or pressure on nearby teeth. Jaw pain has other possible causes too, so please have it checked. You can read about what may be causing jaw pain .

### *At what age do wisdom teeth come through?*

Generally between 17 and 21. They are the last of the 32 adult teeth to erupt, which is why there is often no room left for them by the time they arrive.

### *How many teeth should an adult have?*

Thirty-two, including the four wisdom teeth, compared with 20 primary teeth in childhood. The molars do not replace any baby teeth, which is what accounts for the difference.

### *Which nerves are at risk during wisdom tooth removal?*

The inferior alveolar nerve and the lingual nerve, which sit close to the lower wisdom teeth and supply sensation to the lip, cheek, gum and tongue. Damage to either can cause temporary or, rarely, permanent numbness or pins and needles in those areas, which is why imaging is used to establish where the roots sit before surgery.

### *Will I need the tooth replaced after a wisdom tooth is removed?*

Normally no. Wisdom teeth are considered unnecessary for chewing and speaking, so removing one does not leave a functional gap in the way that losing a first or second molar does.

## Related services and further reading

Wisdom tooth removal

How will I know if I need my wisdom teeth removed?

Recovering from wisdom tooth extraction

Costs involved in wisdom tooth removal

What is causing my jaw pain?

Emergency dentistry

Specialist care

Contact Core Dental

## Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

## Contact Core Dental

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| Phone | 13 13 16 |
| Booking | Online through coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16 |
| Hours | Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday mornings, Sunday closed |

This article is general in nature and does not replace advice from a registered dental practitioner who has examined you. Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

### *What is an impacted wisdom tooth?*

An impacted wisdom tooth is one that is coming in sideways or is held back because there is not enough space. Core Dental dentists can examine the area and arrange an X-ray where appropriate to see what is happening.

### *What causes pain around a wisdom tooth?*

Common causes include impaction, over-eruption, gum inflammation around a partly erupted tooth, and gum disease from trapped food and bacteria. Our Core Dental dentists can examine the area to find the likely cause.

### *What does pericoronitis mean?*

Pericoronitis is inflammation of the gum around a partly erupted wisdom tooth, where food and bacteria can collect under a gum flap, causing swelling and tenderness. Core Dental dentists can clean the area and advise on next steps.

### *Why is it hard to clean around wisdom teeth?*

Wisdom teeth sit at the very back of the mouth where access is restricted, so food can build up and bacteria multiply. Core Dental dentists and hygienists can show you ways to keep the area clean.

### *What risks come with wisdom tooth removal?*

Risks include bleeding, swelling, infection, bruising and dry socket, mostly temporary, and rarely nerve injury causing tingling or numbness. Your Core Dental dentist explains the risks for your tooth before you decide.

### *Who removes wisdom teeth at Core Dental?*

Core Dental dentists assess wisdom teeth, and in complex cases we may refer you to a registered specialist such as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon. Please confirm what is available at your clinic when you book.

### *How do I book a wisdom tooth assessment at Core Dental?*

Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. Tell our team about your pain or swelling and we will arrange an examination, quote before treatment starts and explain interest-free payment plan options.