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What are Wisdom Teeth?

Wisdom teeth are third molars. Normally people have three permanent molars that develop in each quadrant of the mouth; upper, lower, right and left. The first molars usually grow into the mouth at right around six years of age. The second molars grow in at around age 12. The third molars usually will try to grow in at around age 18 to 20 years, and are therefore the last teeth to grow into the mouth. Since that is considered to be the age when people become wiser, third molars gained the nickname, “wisdom teeth.” Wisdom teeth are just as useful as any other tooth if they grow in properly, have a correct bite relationship, and have healthy gum tissue around them. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

What is an impaction?

When wisdom teeth are prevented from erupting into the mouth properly, they are referred to as impacted. Teeth that have not erupted are not necessarily impacted. It may be that it is still too early in someone’s dental development, and if time passes they might grow in properly. A dentist must examine a patient’s mouth and his or her x-rays to determine if the teeth are impacted or will not grow in properly. Impacted teeth can cause problems. Impacted teeth can result in infection, decay of adjacent teeth, gum disease or formation of a cyst or tumor from the sac or follicle around the impacted tooth. The follicle is the tissue which formed the crown of the tooth. Many dentists recommend the removal of impacted wisdom teeth to prevent potential problems.

Erupted wisdom teeth

Erupted wisdom teeth may also need to be removed. The dentist may recommend this if the tooth is non-functional, interfering with the bite, badly decayed, involved with or at risk for periodontal disease, or interfering with restoration of an adjacent tooth. Once again, every case is different and your dentist can determine if there is a reason for you to have a tooth removed.

What is involved in the extraction procedure?

Wisdom tooth extraction involves accessing the tooth through the soft and hard tissue, gently detaching the connective tissue between the tooth and the bone and removing the tooth.