

YOUR HEALTH

DR ADAM PATEL LOOKS AT THE WORLD OF WISDOM TEETH AND DEBUNKS SOME OF THE MYTHS SURROUNDING THEM

Better wise up!

Wisdom teeth are the third and final set of molars that usually present in the late teens to early 20s. Occasionally these teeth can be a valuable asset to the mouth when healthy and correctly aligned.

Often, however, they are misaligned and can thus cause problems which lead to their removal.

Q Do all wisdom teeth require removal?

A No. Non-problematic asymptomatic wisdom teeth – third molars – can often be left in situ, reviewed, consultations and can remain problem-free long-term.

Q What are misaligned wisdom teeth?

A Misaligned teeth in general are teeth that have not erupted and positioned themselves into the correct anatomical position within the mouth.

When wisdom teeth are misaligned, they may erupt through horizontally, be angled towards or away from the second molars or be angled upwards or outwards.

Poorly aligned wisdom teeth can lead to crowding of teeth, damage to adjacent teeth, the jawbone or even nerves in the teeth.

Q What are impacted and partially impacted wisdom teeth?

A Another term for impacted teeth is buried teeth – they are enclosed within soft tissue and/or the jawbone.

Occasionally, they can be partially visible through the gum if the impaction is only partial rather than complete.

Q What are the potential problems of partially impacted wisdom teeth?

A Partial eruption of the wisdom tooth allows an opening for bacteria to enter around the tooth and cause an infection, which results in pain, swelling, jaw stiffness, and general illness.

Partially erupted teeth are also more prone to tooth decay

and gum disease because their hard-to-reach location and awkward positioning makes brushing and flossing difficult.

Q Who decides if the tooth should be removed or not?

A The judgment is based on clinical findings. The final

decision is made by the patient, as with any medical procedure.

Once you have sufficient information to provide informed consent having weighed up the risks versus benefits, the decision will ultimately rest with you.

Q How do I know if I have wisdom teeth?

A Your dentist will look for the presence and positioning of your wisdom teeth.

X-rays can be taken to judge where the wisdom teeth are,

but this is not always necessary.

If your dentist thinks it necessary they may refer you to a specialist oral surgeon for further assessment.

Q How are wisdom teeth removed?

A The relative ease with which your wisdom tooth is removed depends largely on the position and stage of development.

Your doctor or dentist can give you a greater insight into what to expect during and after the procedure based on the difficulty of your particular case.

A wisdom tooth which has fully appeared through the gum with no other complications can be extracted in a similar manner to any other tooth in your mouth.

However, wisdom teeth that are embedded in the jawbone and covered by gum require incisions and removal of overlying tissue – gum or gum and bone – before the tooth is removed.

Often, the tooth may be removed in small segments rather than removed whole in order to minimise the amount of surrounding bone that needs to be removed to get the tooth out.

Q What happens during wisdom teeth removal?

A Depending on the complexity of the procedure, various methods of anaesthesia will be offered.

Local anaesthetic – the same as when you have normal extractions and restorations, sedation or general anaesthetic.

Following removal of the tooth or teeth, depending on the size of the incision and complexity of the procedure, the socket will be either packed or stitched.

More immediate post-operative side-effects include pain, bleeding, bruising, swelling and difficulty with jaw opening fully temporarily.

Q What are the potential complications of wisdom teeth removal?

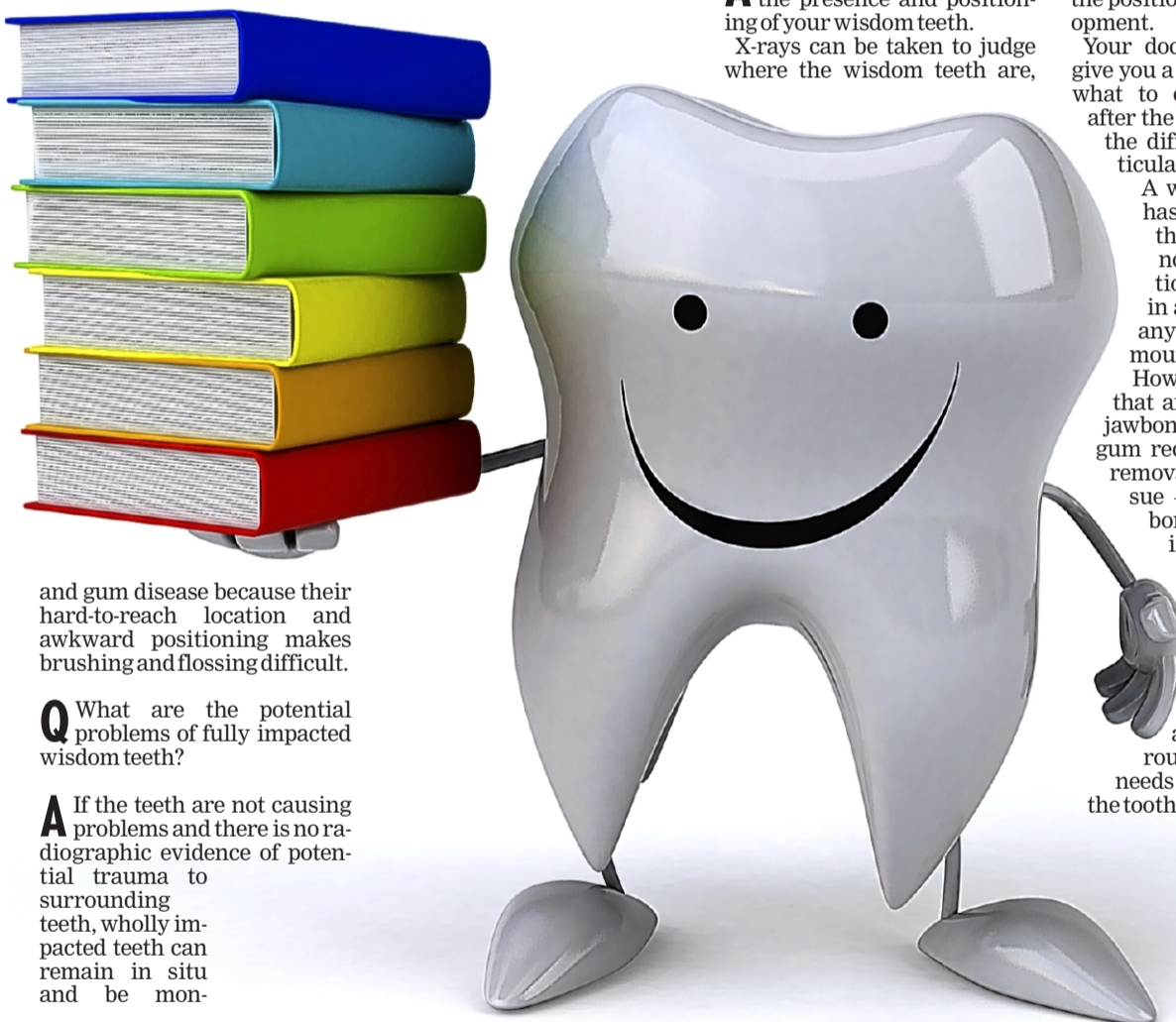
A The key complication is potential numbness of an adjacent nerve or nerves.

The relative risk of this complication occurring is very low, and with each individual case the risks will always be outlined prior to initiating treatment.

Numbness of nerves can be temporary or permanent, and depending on how much of a nerve is affected, the effects can be felt in the gums, teeth, tongue and lip.

Other complications include trismus, or limited jaw opening, and a dry socket which is an infection of the hole where the tooth was.

The intricacies of the treatment, post-operative side-effects, complications and risks will be dealt with in a future column in a few weeks.



Meet the man with the answers on oral health issues

THE Leicester Mercury has teamed up with Leicestershire dentist Dr Adam Patel (pictured) to help readers with any dental and oral health problems they might have.

People are invited to send in any questions and Dr Patel will answer a selection of them through a regular column on this page, the Leicester Mercury's Monday health section.

Dr Patel said: "I hope I will be able to help people with information and advice which they can

put into practice. My experience in seeing patients is that there is quite a lack of dental and oral health information and education.

"Your mouth is the start of your digestive system and people often don't realise there is a distinct link between oral and general health.

"It can also have a big impact on a person's psychological and social wellbeing. Bad oral health is very visible and can impact on aspects of life, from a person's personal life to getting a job."

Dr Patel, who was educated at the City of Leicester School and Sixth Form College, said: "I hope I will be able to help readers with the information I can provide."

Dr Patel's replies should only be used as a reference – he is not a replacement for your own dentist.

If you have a query you would like to raise please summarise it in about 200 words and e-mail it to the address below. Put "health questions" in the subject line.

Alternatively, send your 200-word summary to Cathy Buss, Health

Questions, Leicester Mercury, St George Street, Leicester, LE1 9FQ.

Please note, an edited version of the information you send us might appear on this page.

Please include a contact name and phone number in case we have any queries about your submission.

These details will not be published. Dr Patel will not be able to send personal responses to letters.

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