

SURGERY FOR IMPACTED TEETH

This information was prepared for you to understand better the reasons for surgical removal of impacted teeth and what to expect during surgery and recovery. You are encouraged to discuss with the oral surgeon any questions you may have.

WHAT ARE IMPACTED TEETH?

All teeth develop in soft tissue sacs deep in the jawbones. Normally, in the process of eruption, each tooth sheds its sac as it comes into the mouth to take its place in the dental arch. Sometimes this process goes wrong. A tooth may travel in the wrong direction or may be blocked from erupting by another tooth, bone or dense gum tissue. The resulting abnormality is an impacted tooth.

Most commonly, third molars (wisdom teeth) become impacted, but any tooth may do so. Occasionally, there are even extra teeth, called supernumerary teeth, which develop and are usually impacted. During thousands of years of evolution, the human jaws have become smaller, leaving in adequate space in the mouth for normal eruption of third molars. As a result, they become impacted. Sometimes premature loss of primary teeth (baby teeth) causes loss of space in the dental arch, leading to impaction of other permanent teeth.

WHAT'S BAD ABOUT IMPACTED TEETH?

Impacted teeth cause or aggravate many conditions, including:

1. **Acute infection (periodontitis).** This is a gum infection around an impacted tooth. It can easily spread to the cheek, throat and neck, becoming quite serious. Significant general bodily illness may occur. Pericoronitis is common and often occurs.
2. **a. Chronic infection (periodontitis).** This is a similar infection, but it is confined to the gums and adjacent bone. It often produces no symptoms until very late. Then treatment may require extensive periodontal surgery or even loss of teeth.
b. Chronic infection (dental caries). Tooth decay is a chronic infection of the tooth itself, with well known symptoms. Whenever saliva can reach an impacted tooth, which may happen even when the tooth can't be seen in the mouth, the impacted tooth or adjacent tooth root can decay. Cavities of this type can't be filled, therefore these teeth have to be removed.
3. **Physical injury.** Sometimes impacted teeth can erode teeth against which they lie. Impacted teeth can contribute to movement of adjacent teeth out of position.
4. **Cysts, tumors.** Rarely these lesions occur in the jaws. When they do, they are frequently associated with impacted teeth, because abnormal growth of the original developmental tooth sacs causes dental cysts and tumors.

WHY SHOULD IMPACTED TEETH BE REMOVED?

In most cases, impacted teeth do cause problems like these, and their removal is indicated to prevent or eliminate the problems. However, since all impacted teeth should not necessarily be removed, the oral surgeon evaluates each case individually and makes appropriate recommendations.

If removal is indicated, it is best done as a preventive procedure. Proper timing of this treatment can ease recovery, maximize healing, reduce the risks of surgery and anesthesia. Of course, if a problem from an impacted tooth has already occurred, it is necessary to remove the tooth both to treat the problem and to prevent its recurrence.

WHAT IS EXPECTED AFTER SURGERY?

Unlike removal of an ordinary erupted tooth, removal of an impacted tooth is an operation in every sense. Because it is partially or completely beneath the surface, it must be removed surgically. This operation involves careful soft tissue and bone dissection and is done in keeping with good surgical principles. Appropriate anesthesia is chosen to provide maximum comfort for the patient.

Like any other operation, the body has certain normal responses during the initial stages of healing. You should expect;

1. **Swelling of the jaws.** This may seem quite considerable and may last at least several days. Swelling is usually accompanied by stiffness of the jaws, preventing completely normal chewing.
2. **Discomfort.** Usually well controlled with the strong pain medication you will be given
3. **Bleeding.** Often there will be some oozing for a day or two after surgery. Bruises may show on the skin later from this oozing in the deeper tissues.

Specific instructions for post-operative care will be given to you for maximum comfort and speedy recovery. The minimum usual recovery period is 3-7 days. Complete healing requires several months.

WHAT ABOUT COMPLICATOINS?

The great majority of patients have surgery, anesthesia, and recovery without any complications. However, as with any procedure, there is some risk involved. The more common complications of surgery for impacted teeth include:

1. **Dry Socket.** This is a delayed healing process which can occur when any tooth is removed. The normal blood clot in the wound is rejected and a “dry” socket results. A medicated dressing can be placed by the oral surgeon to provide rapid relief.
2. **Infection.** Bacterial infection in an oral surgical wound does not occur often, despite the fact that the mouth is not sterile. Appropriate treatment will be provided as indicated.
3. **Numbness.** This may occur when the nearness of certain nerves to the surgical area makes bruising of these nerves unavoidable. Complete or partial numbness of the lip, chin, gums, cheek or tongue could result. The nerves usually repair themselves, but healing may take several months. Rarely, the condition is permanent.
4. **Sinus opening.** All upper back teeth, particularly impacted upper third molars, lie very close to the sinus cavity. Because of this anatomy the sinus can be involved during removal of any of these teeth. If this should occur, a special sinus closure may be performed at the time of surgery.
5. **Involvement of Adjacent Teeth.** Sometimes an adjacent tooth may become sensitive after removal of its impacted neighbor. Ordinarily the sensitivity will disappear. Loosening or breakage of a filling or crown may require its repair or replacement.

WHAT ABOUT AFTER SURGERY?

1. **Follow up Visits.** You will be scheduled for a post-operative office visit 7-10 days after your surgery to evaluate your healing and overall recovery.
2. **Questions or Problems.** You will always be able to reach an on-call doctor quickly by calling the office at any time.