

WISDOM TEETH



HOW YOUR WISDOM TEETH GROW

At about age nine, the crown of your wisdom (third molar) tooth begins to form in a small sack inside your jaw and the roots begin to grow into the bone. By your late teens, the crown begins erupting if there is room. Roots continue to lengthen in the jawbone, which has nearly reached its adult size. By your early twenties, the crown has either emerged or become impacted. Roots are completely formed and the jawbone has finished growing.

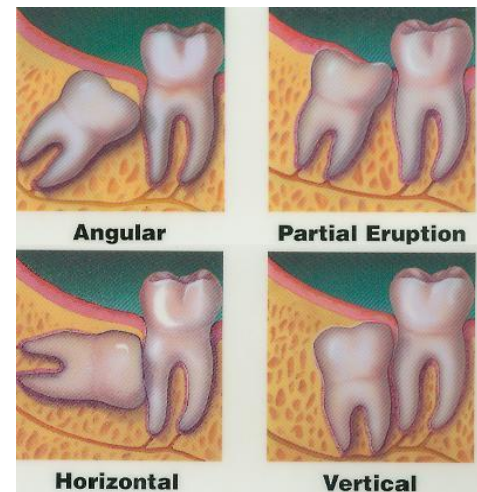
When wisdom teeth do not have enough room to properly erupt, they become trapped in the bone and grow wherever they can. The crown may only partially break through the gum or, in some cases, they can remain completely in the bone. The roots, which hold the tooth in place, may become misshapen or grow dangerously close to the sinus cavity or nerves in your jaw.

POSITION OF IMPACTION

Cramped for room, impacted wisdom teeth grow in many different directions, commonly at an angle. A wisdom tooth may grow at an angle toward or away from your other teeth or they can grow in a horizontal or vertical position.

ADVANTAGES OF EARLY REMOVAL

Like all teeth, wisdom teeth develop inside an opening in your jaw where they are protected by bone and gum tissue. Over time, as their roots lengthen and the jawbone becomes denser, your wisdom teeth become more firmly anchored in your jaw. This makes it more difficult to remove them as you get older. The roots of the wisdom teeth can also get closer to the nerve canal that lies underneath them as you get older, which makes extraction more complicated later in life.



WISDOM TOOTH PROBLEMS

Whether wisdom teeth cause your mouth harm depends on several factors including the size of your jaw and how your wisdom teeth grow in. Problem wisdom teeth can sometimes cause symptoms such as pain or swelling, or you may have no symptoms at all but your other teeth may still remain at risk of damage.

- **GUM DISEASE**—When a wisdom tooth partially breaks through the surface of the gum tissue, bacteria can get under the flap of remaining gum tissue causing an infection (pericoronitis)
- **CROWDING**—An impacted or partially erupted wisdom tooth may not have enough room to erupt fully and end up pushing on the adjacent teeth. This won't cause crowding in other teeth, but this pressure can cause resorption of the adjacent tooth's root.
- **DECAY**—If a wisdom tooth does not fully erupt through the gum, it can be very difficult to clean properly and can fall victim to tooth decay and cavities.
- **POOR POSITION**—A wisdom tooth that grows toward the cheek can irritate nearby tissue. If an erupted tooth is crooked, it can cause your bite to change as well.
- **CYSTS**—If the tooth becomes impacted and the sac that the crown is formed in remains in the bone it can fill with fluid and form a cyst that can destroy the surrounding bone.

