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Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery
General Information Regarding Removal of Impacted Teeth

What is an Impacted Tooth?

All teeth are formed deep within the jaw bones. As the root develops most teeth travel toward their future place in the dental arch. This movement is called eruption. If a tooth travels in the wrong direction, or is blocked by another tooth or by dense bone it is said to be impacted or unerupted.

What Harm Do Impacted Teeth Do?

Since it is not normal for a tooth to remain beneath the surface after the age of seventeen to twenty-one years, it is easy to understand why difficulties develop. Whenever saliva can reach the crown and this may happen even though the impacted tooth can not be seen in the mouth – decay may occur just as in ordinary teeth. There is no way to fill such cavities and severe toothache and infection can occur. This infection may spread to the cheek, throat, or neck, with severe pain, stiffness of the jaws, and general bodily illness. As impacted teeth press against other good teeth they injure their roots or push teeth out of position. Sometimes large cysts form around the crowns of impacted teeth with the destruction of much bone and damage to other teeth in the region.

If a patient with an impacted tooth waits until it causes trouble, he may first have to be treated for the infection or other complication before the operation for removal can be done. This means additional loss of time and expense as well as added risks.

Why Should Impacted Teeth Be Removed Unless They Cause Trouble?

While it is true that not all impacted teeth cause the complications that have been described, no one can tell by an x-ray which ones are going to give difficulty or when. Trouble usually comes unexpectedly and at inconvenient times. Older individuals do not stand the operation as well as younger people, and the operation is more difficult with advancing age. For these reasons, in this office all patients with impacted teeth are advised to have them removed.

What Is It Like To Have An Impacted Tooth Removed?

Many ordinary teeth can be extracted simply by grasping with forceps and manipulating carefully from the socket. This is, of course, not possible with impacted teeth since they are partially or completely beneath the surface. We consider the removal of an impacted tooth an operation in every sense of the word. This is not said to frighten the prospective patient, but to give better understanding about certain features regarding the cost, careful preparations, selection of operators, and need for good aftercare.

Impacted or imbedded teeth may be removed in the hospital or in the office with intravenous sedation or general anesthesia.

Are There Any Complications?

Any operation carries some risks. This is reduced by preoperative appraisal of your physical condition, by careful preparation of instruments and all facilities, and by the skill of the operator.

The wound remaining after the impacted tooth is removed is a large one and healing may be delayed because the body is unable to build normal tissue as quickly as with a small wound. Though most impacted teeth sockets heal promptly, a small percentage may take longer and need some type of dressing every few days until normal healing begins. There is often some amount of bleeding afterwards but this will usually be slight and will stop by itself after a few hours. Instructions will be given that tell what to do if more serious bleeding should occur.

Lower teeth often rest on the main nerve to the lower jaw. Sometimes, in spite of all precautions, this nerve is bruised, slightly torn, or even cut. The result will be numbness of the lower lip, chin, tongue, and all other teeth on that side. This effect does not usually last more than a few months, improving as the nerve repairs itself and regenerates. Very rarely it may last longer, even permanently.

Upper teeth lie against the wall of the maxillary sinus or antrum. Occasionally the thin wall of the bone cracks slightly, resulting in sinus exposure. In such event the patient may notice the presence of blood in the nose. This exposure usually heals with medication and/or surgical closure.

All patients about to have impacted teeth removed should understand that adjacent teeth may have been weakened or otherwise injured by the presence of the impacted tooth. This injury may not become apparent until the impacted tooth is removed. Adjacent teeth must therefore be considered on probation for three to six months after the impacted tooth has been taken out.

I certify that I have read and fully understand this form and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Patient's Signature

Date