



#3 Wisen Up!

Wisdom teeth removed doesn't have to be a painful and unpleasant experience, says DR HO KOK SEN, dental specialist in oral and maxillofacial surgery. "Most patients are able to resume their normal activities soon after they have done the procedure. In fact, some patients attend business dinners that same night!"

What are wisdom teeth?

Also known as third molars, wisdom teeth emerge during early adulthood. A panoramic dental radiograph (x-ray) will confirm the number of wisdom teeth in a person's mouth and indicate whether there are any buried teeth. In certain cases, detailed 3D scans (known as cone beam computed tomography) may be done to pinpoint their exact position in relation to important structures like the dental nerve and maxillary sinus.

When are they a problem?

Wisdom teeth often do not properly erupt and can grow sideways, emerge partway out of the gum, or remain trapped beneath the gum and bone, causing chronic pain, migraines, headaches and facial pain. When wisdom teeth do not grow properly, the adjacent teeth are more likely to decay; a tooth can become so badly decayed that root canal therapy may be the only way to salvage it, or

it may even have to be replaced by a dental implant.

Even when the wisdom teeth erupt properly, there is a chance that there will be a tight fit at the back of the mouth, making it a challenge to clean the teeth properly, which may lead to tooth decay.

When should they be removed?

Generally, it is recommended that wisdom teeth be removed in one's teens or young adulthood, when recovery is faster because the bone is more elastic and the roots shorter. After the age of 30, you may be at greater risk for gum disease in the surrounding tissues.

How is it done?

Surgical options include:

- **Local anaesthesia**, which is how most minor oral surgery is performed.
- **Sedation**, where the oral surgery is performed while the patient is in a light sleep. This can be done in the clinic with the assistance of an anaesthetist.
- **General anaesthesia**, usually administered in a hospital or day surgery centre, which increase the cost of treatment. Recovery from anaesthesia is a little slower than with sedation.

"Whichever you select," says Dr Ho, "rest assured that you will receive the

utmost care and attention to ensure your safety and comfort both during and after the procedure."

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#4 Lighten Up!

Tooth whitening is a popular dental technique to rejuvenate the colour of teeth that have become dull and yellow after years of accumulating internal stains, says DR THEAN TSIN PIAO.

Did you know?

Unlike simple **scaling and polishing**, which is a purely **mechanical process** that removes surface stains caused by substances such as coffee, tea and red wine, **tooth whitening** removes internal stains through an **oxidation process**. The most common ingredient used for whitening teeth is **peroxide gel**.

Home or away?

- The **take-home** whitening system usually involves a customised tray filled with peroxide gel in a 10- to 20-percent concentration. You wear this tray for 30 minutes every day, for 14 days.
- The **in-office** system is a one-off treatment that uses a much higher concentration of peroxide gel – 30 to 40 percent – and takes from 30 to 60 minutes. The higher the concentration of gel, the faster the whitening process.

What can you expect?

You can look forward to teeth that are six to eight shades whiter – usually to the colour of your teenage teeth. Teeth may be sensitive during the whitening procedure, but the effect is transient. When using the take-home system, take great care to ensure that the gel does not come into contact with the gums, says Dr Thean, or it will burn them.

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