



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 proper place in the dental arch. This movement is called eruption. If a tooth travels in the wrong direction, it is blocked by another tooth, or by dense bone, it is said to be unerupted or impacted.

What harm do impacted teeth do?

Since it is not normal for a tooth to remain beneath the surface after the age of eighteen 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 cannot be seen in the mouth, decay may occur just as in ordinary teeth. There is no way to fill such cavities and severe toothaches can eventually result.

Likewise, the germs in the saliva may cause pericoronitis, an infection around the crown of the tooth. This infection may spread into the cheek, throat, or neck, with severe pain, stiffness of the jaws, and generally bodily illness.

As impacted teeth press against other good teeth, they injure their roots or push these teeth out of position.

Sometimes a large cyst forms around the crown of an impacted tooth with significant destruction of bone and damage to other teeth in the region.

Why should impacted teeth be removed when they are not obviously causing 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 picture which ones are going to give difficulty or when. Trouble usually comes unexpectedly and at inconvenient times. Older individuals do not handle the operation for removal as well as younger people, and the operation is more difficult with advancing age.

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 some added risk.

The longer one waits, the harder the bone is around the impacted tooth, the less the blood flow, the longer the healing time, and the more complications there are after the tooth is removed. For example, at the age of 30, the incidence of “dry socket” (condensing osteitis) is three times more likely to occur than at the age of 18.

It is true, especially in regards to removal of impacted teeth, that an “ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. If you have additional questions or concerns, please ask any of our staff.