



There are a lot of theories as to how wisdom teeth got their name. One theory holds that they don't usually start to show themselves until we're about 18 years old – the age by which we are assumed to be wise. Well, if that's the case, then this little test should be a breeze.

True or false:

- Everyone's wisdom teeth will come in sooner or later.
- Everyone's wisdom teeth should come out sooner or later.
- The sure sign that wisdom teeth should be removed is if they're causing pain.
- Everyone is born with wisdom teeth.

If you answered "True" to any of these questions, you've got some wising up to do.

The truth is:

1. Some people's wisdom teeth never erupt. These are referred to as impacted wisdom teeth. Unfortunately, these teeth can still cause significant problems below the gum line by growing into and damaging the 12-year molars. In this situation, your dentist may recommend their removal.
2. In addition to problematic impacted wisdom teeth, partially erupted wisdom teeth (poking through the gums a little bit) may need to be removed. Bits of food and bacteria get trapped in the pockets between the partially erupted tooth and gum, and can cause infections and gum disease, not to mention discomfort. As there is always some risk of nerve damage to the lower jaw when removing wisdom teeth, your dentist will evaluate the risks and benefits of tooth removal in your individual circumstance and will consult with you on management or removal.
3. Most people who are having problems with their wisdom teeth experience pain in cycles. When the pain goes away for a while, they often decide it's not a big enough problem to worry about. These pain cycles can continue for years. However, it's better to remove the offending tooth early, as both the surgery and the healing afterward tend to be much easier when the jawbones are younger and spongier.
4. There is a small percentage of lucky people who are born with at least one wisdom tooth missing. Some people don't have any at all!

Regular dental visits are an important part of keeping your wisdom teeth healthy and stable – and helping your dentist make an appropriately timed recommendation for their removal, should that be necessary.