



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 telltale sign that wisdom teeth should be removed is if they're constantly causing pain.
- Everyone is born with wisdom teeth.

The truth is:

- Some wisdom teeth never erupt. These are referred to as impacted wisdom teeth. Unfortunately, these teeth can still wreak havoc below the gum line by growing into and damaging the 12-year molars. If this should happen, they should be removed.
- In addition to problematic impacted wisdom teeth, partially erupted wisdom teeth (poking through the gums a little bit) should also be removed. Bits of food and bacteria get trapped in the pockets between the partially erupted tooth and gum, and cause infections and gum disease, not to mention pain. But according to Dr. Robert Boyd, Orthodontist, Periodontist, and Chairman of the Orthodontics Department at University of the Pacific School of Dentistry, the trend today is to leave healthy, stable, wisdom teeth alone, monitoring them over the years to make sure they stay healthy and stable. Dr. Alex McDonald, Oral Surgeon and Director of the Implant Clinic at UOP agrees, pointing out that the risks involved when using anesthesia and the risk of nerve damage to the lower jaw when removing the lower wisdom teeth should be considered when recommending removal of impacted wisdom teeth.
- 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 wisdom teeth as early as possible, as both the surgery and the healing afterward tend to be much easier when the jawbones are younger and spongier.

- 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 CDA member dentist make an appropriately timed recommendation for their removal, should that be necessary.