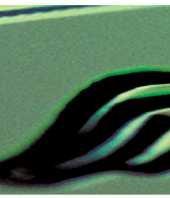




# The Oral Surgery Corner



EDUCATION &  
INSIGHT



## THIRD MOLAR REMOVAL

*by John H. Muse, D.D.S.*

*Diplomate, American Board Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery*



During the spring months we see many teenage patients for consultation regarding the removal of their third molars, so that they can plan and schedule their surgery during the summer months. Frequently, there are questions about when is the best time to

have these teeth removed, do they have to be removed, and is removal of asymptomatic wisdom teeth indicated in the older, adult population. The following few paragraphs briefly summarize my philosophy regarding third molars.

In an ideal perfect world we would simply be born without our wisdom teeth. Unfortunately, most of us are stuck with them in some form or fashion. If you are born with them, the best time to have them removed is as a young teenager, 14 to 16 years old. Actually, it is not so much based on the patient's age, but rather the development of the third molars. Ideally, it is best to remove third molars when they are 50 to 75% formed, which for females tends to be around age 14 to 15, and for males around age 15 to 16. Of course everyone is different; therefore, the best time for the initial wisdom tooth screening using an orthopantomogram is age fourteen.

Removal of third molars in the early to mid-teenage years is very predictable, and the potential damage to the underlying inferior alveolar nerve is very low. After age 25 to 30, I feel that it is best not to remove asymptomatic, non-pathologic, unerupted third molars. The surgery is more difficult, the post-operative course is always more prolonged, and the potential for permanent paresthesia can be very real depending on the proximity of the roots to the nerve.

Fully erupted third molars are not as innocuous as once believed. Recent articles have demonstrated the common presence of probing depths greater than 5 mm surrounding erupted third molars, and the prevalence of periodontal pathogens associated with these increased depths contributing to oral inflammation and systemic disease. The systemic risks of chronic oral inflammation with periodontal pathology are very real, especially for women of childbearing age.

Furthermore, as we all know, we are living longer. We see this every day in our own practices. It is not uncommon to see patients 85 and older for removal of a problematic third molar. Such surgery can be extremely difficult to recover from and even potentially life threatening depending on the patient's over all health.

In summary, third molars should be removed in the early teenage years. Of course, such a recommendation coming from an oral surgeon, people will say, "you are just trying to drum up business". My response to that remark is very simple. I just treat everyone like they are in my family and the proof is in the pudding. I removed my 16-year-old son's third molars this past January, and my precious daughter, who owns my heart, will have her wisdom teeth removed when she is around 14 – 15 years old.

Please call me if you would like to receive copies of the above articles. I also have a "Lunch and Learn" presentation on third molar removal that I have given to several offices. Please let me know if you are interested and we will be more than happy to come to your office. We'll even bring lunch!

Thanks as always for all your support. I hope you have a great summer!

***Now is a great time to inform your patients to begin making arrangements for wisdom teeth removal. I encourage you to begin scheduling consultation appointments as soon as possible, so that we may accommodate your patient's needs during this busy summer season.***