

The Wise Patient's Cheat Sheet on Wisdom Teeth Removal

There's no way around it: the time has come for your wisdom teeth to be extracted. According to the horror stories out there, you are in for nothing but non-stop agony, but you don't have to share the same fate!

Being proactive and fully prepared for what happens during and after surgery can minimize the pain and help ensure a smooth recovery. Make the experience easier on yourself by following these expert tips and tricks.



1. Read the procedure and recovery guidelines well in advance.

Understanding what to expect at every stage of the process can help you plan and gather items for your recovery more efficiently. Knowing potential complications that can arise—such as Dry Sockets, a painful condition due to blood clot failure, or Paresthesia, a numbness of the lip, chin and/or tongue—can also help you detect and address serious problems immediately. Be sure to raise any questions or concerns with your dentist at this time to save you from having to make calls while you heal.

2. Clear your calendar for recovery.

Many patients undermine their recovery because they did not realize the physical toll of a surgery such as this. Multi-tasking and strenuous activities can disrupt your healing time, or worse—distract you from costly complications. Put plans on hold and relax as much as possible. If you go to school or work during the weekdays, consider scheduling the surgery for a Friday for minimal disruption of your schedule, and give yourself the whole weekend to rest.

3. Enlist the help of family and friends beforehand.

Not only will you need someone to drive you to and from the dentist's office on the day of the surgery, you may need extra support getting and preparing food, placing necessary calls, or completing important tasks and chores. Ask loved ones for help in advance, so they can adjust their schedules accordingly.

4. Stock up on supplies.

Gather items that can make your post-operative experience more comfortable. In addition to medications your dentist may prescribe for you, these essentials can help ease your pain:

- **Ice packs** (or even a pack of frozen vegetables) to reduce swelling
- **Soft foods**, such as yogurt, pudding or ice cream
- **Tea bags**, an effective alternative (when moistened) to biting gauze when bleeding
- **Salt** to combine with water for a safe mouth rinse that can reduce irritation

For a pleasant distraction from the pain, it's also a good idea to pick up books, DVDs, music or other forms of entertainment.

5. Make a "Do Not Do" list.

After crafting your to-do list, write down a list of cautionary reminders as well. Avoid unnecessary discomfort and complications by remembering to steer clear of these major no-no's:

- **Sipping from a straw**; doing so can disrupt blood clotting and cause dry sockets
- **Eating spicy or hot foods**, as they can exacerbate the pain
- **Smoking or drinking alcohol**, as they can interfere with the healing process
- **Driving or operating heavy machinery**; medications may impair everyday abilities

Get Your Dentist's Advice

Last, but not least, take advantage of your dentist's history of wisdom teeth removal to improve your own experience. He or she has probably seen and heard it all, and can provide additional recommendations based on your individual situation.