

Impacted canines

What are impacted canines?

Canines are the corner teeth, often known as “fangs” or “eye” teeth. There are two canine teeth in the top jaw and two in the bottom jaw.

These teeth can become IMPACTED. If this happens they do not grow into the mouth but stay buried in the jaw bone under the gum

Canine teeth in the top jaw are more commonly impacted in the roof of the mouth (palate). The “baby” canine tooth is often still in place.

Who do canines become impacted?

No one knows the reason why these teeth may become impacted. Up to 3% of the general population will have an impacted canine and 85% of these are under the gum in the roof of the mouth.

Why are canines important?

They help give a pleasing, balanced and symmetrical smile.

What are the treatment options?

There are a number of options. Which one is suitable for you will depend on where your canine tooth is buried, your age, whether you want to wear a fixed brace, the space for the canine tooth and how long the treatment might take.

Option 1: No treatment

- Leave the buried canine where it is if it is not causing any problems
- The buried tooth may be x-rayed occasionally by your dentist to check the tooth is not causing problems.

What problems can occur?

- There is a small risk that the buried tooth could damage the roots of the front teeth or a cyst may develop around the buried canine, the tooth will then usually be removed..

- The canine may start to appear when you are older and you may seek advice from an orthodontist then.

What happens to the baby canine tooth?

- If the baby tooth is still present, it will be kept, but it may not last a lifetime.
- If the baby tooth is lost when you are an adult, you will be left with a gap which your dentist may be able to fill with a denture, bridge or implant.
- Your orthodontist/dentist can advise you on the possible options.

Option 2: An operation to uncover the buried tooth and bring it into the correct position in the mouth

- A small "window" of gum and bone is removed over the buried tooth to help it grow into the mouth.
- Sometimes a gold chain or brace attachment is stuck on to the tooth either at the time of the operation or later on in the treatment.
- Fixed braces are used to bring the canine tooth into the correct position.
- You may need to have other teeth removed to make enough space for the canine.

What will the operation involve?

- The operation will involve a general or local anesthetic.
- After the operation you will have stitches and possibly something(a "dressing") to cover the canine
- You will be advised on how to keep the area clean with mouthwashes and tooth brushing and what simple painkillers to take.

How long will I need to wear a fixed brace?

Moving an impacted canine can be a very slow process. It can often take more than two years for the treatment to be completed. You will need regular orthodontic appointments during treatment for the fixed brace to be adjusted.

Will I feel the tooth being pulled down?

It is likely to be sore for about 3-5 days each time the brace is adjusted. If necessary, simple painkillers such as the ones you would normally take for a headache should help- please read the instructions on the packet.

Will the treatment work?

Usually. However, in rare cases, the buried tooth is fused to the bone and will not move. If this happens, the tooth may need to be removed and you may require further dental treatment.

Option 3: An operation to remove the buried tooth completely

This option may be suitable if:

- You do not want to wear a fixed brace
- The rest of your teeth are straight with no gaps
- The buried tooth is in a poor position
- The buried tooth is causing problems.

You may require further dental or orthodontic treatment in the future if this leaves you with a baby canine tooth or a gap.

Option 4: An operation to "transplant" the buried tooth to its proper position

This option is not often chosen and can only be considered in certain cases.

There needs to be enough space between the teeth. It has a lower success rate than the other options. However, if this option is suitable for you, your orthodontist will explain what is involved in more detail.

Every patient is different.

This leaflet provides general information on the possible treatment options available.