

Impacted teeth

Unfortunately, in some patients not all their teeth come into the mouth in the right direction. Sometimes, the teeth can get stuck in the gums or something can be blocking the route that the tooth needs to follow to come into the mouth. In dentistry we say that these teeth have become impacted. This affects approximately 2-3% of the population. This most commonly affects the upper canine teeth but can affect others as well.

How will you know this has happened?

If an adult tooth has not come into position by the time it should have this will usually have been noticed by your dentist. Your dentist will then either take an X-ray themselves or refer you to us for an assessment.

On taking the X-ray we will be able to see if the tooth is there at all and if it is where it is. This will then help us know what treatment is best in your case.



Figure 1. An X-ray showing that the upper left canine is impacted. The image shows that this tooth has not come into the mouth in the way that the canine on the other side has.

Why do teeth become impacted?

This is a question that is difficult to answer. In some cases there is something, like an extra bit of tooth tissue or a baby tooth, that is blocking the way. However, sometimes the reason why the tooth has come through is unknown, although it is thought that genetics may play an important role.

Can these teeth cause problems?

Unfortunately the answer to this question is: yes. If left untreated these teeth can sometimes cause damage to adjacent teeth or have cysts associated with them that can get infected. As part of the assessment process we will identify if any of these problems have happened and inform you of the implications of this.

What can be done?

This depends on the position of the teeth. Sometimes there are a long way away from the correct position and so we cannot bring them into line. In these cases the teeth will either need to be left where they are or removed.

Sometimes, they have not been displaced as far and then we can use braces to pull them into position.

What do the braces involve?

If these teeth can be brought into line then this often requires a number of steps.

Firstly a thorough assessment involving full records is required (see [What happens if I'm accepted for treatment?](#))

If the tooth is unlikely to come into the mouth by itself it will require a surgical procedure to uncover the tooth. This is usually carried out under a general anaesthetic. During the procedure the tooth will be identified and then either a window will be made in the gum so that it can be seen in the mouth, or if this is not possible a chain will be attached to the tooth.

Fixed braces are then placed (see [Fixed braces](#)) to bring the tooth into line with the rest of the teeth.

The length that this takes depends on the position of the tooth but unfortunately this usually takes between 2-3 years of brace treatment.

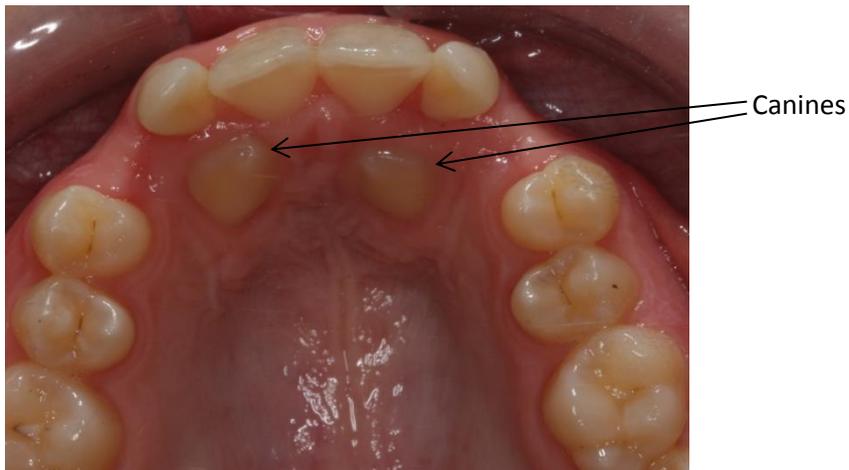


Figure 1. An example of what the canines look like after the surgeons have uncovered them.



Figure 2. An example where a gold chain has been placed on the teeth. The braces have been used firstly to pull the teeth into the mouth on the gold chain and then to bring them into the correct position.

Will it definitely work?

Whilst in the vast majority of cases if we assess the tooth and decide to try to align it then we are successful. However, there are rare cases in which the tooth that has not come through is stuck in the bone. In these cases the braces are unable to move the teeth and another solution to the space must be found.