

# Pericoronitis

## A painful problem

Pericoronitis is an inflammation of the gum tissues that cover the chewing surface of molars that have not fully erupted through the gum tissue. It most often occurs with the wisdom teeth, also called third molars.

Pericoronitis is painful and can lead to more serious problems. It is important to treat it as soon as possible to restore the health of your mouth.

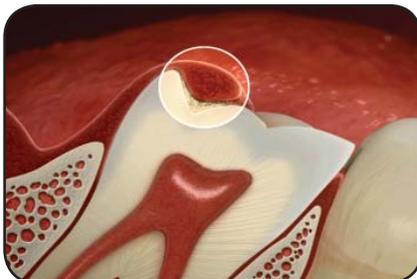
## Symptoms of pericoronitis

You may realize you have pericoronitis when—

- ❖ your back gums are swollen, red, and painful.
- ❖ you have a bad taste, pus or odor in your mouth.
- ❖ you have difficulty opening your mouth wide.



Partially erupted wisdom tooth with gum flap



Food particles trapped under gum flap



Swollen tissue around a partially erupted tooth

## The causes of pericoronitis

The most common cause of pericoronitis is food, bacteria, or plaque trapped beneath a flap of gum tissue.

The flap is formed when a molar begins moving toward the surface of the gum tissue. Before the tooth erupts through the gum, gum tissue covers the area completely, but as the molar emerges, only part of the tooth remains covered by gum tissue. This creates a flap where food and bacteria can become easily trapped but that is difficult to keep clean. Inflammation and infection can very quickly develop.

In addition, if the upper molar comes through fully before the lower one, the upper tooth may bite down on the lower gum flap, worsening the condition.

## Diagnosis and treatment

It is important to treat pericoronitis because, if it is left untreated, a much more serious infection can spread to the neck and cheeks.

To determine whether you have pericoronitis, we perform a thorough examination. The exam may include probing the gum around the affected tooth and taking x-rays.

To treat pericoronitis, we remove plaque and bacteria from the affected tooth and rinse around and under the gum flap. To prevent pericoronitis from reoccurring, we may, depending on the circumstances, surgically remove or reshape the gum around the tooth, or extract the tooth.

Homecare may include rinsing your mouth with warm salt water or an antimicrobial mouthwash. We may suggest that you use an oral irrigator to help keep the area bacteria-free.