Wisdom teeth ? How can I pay for removal as a CU student? [1]

Dear Alice,

One of my wisdom teeth started growing in a few months ago, but ever since I have been unable to chew with that side of the mouth without also experiencing pain from the slight bit of gums covering it. I only just realized as I was eating dinner that I have been habitually chewing with the other side and it even feels weird now to try the other. I tried nonetheless, and found pain when I attempted to gnash some food. I have read the other articles about wisdom teeth on Alice! but am still wondering if I need the tooth removed and if so, approximately how much would it cost me as a Columbia student on the basic insurance plan. I'm also not sure if the insurance covers my expenses, and am afraid I don't have much money to spend.

Another idea I have been thinking of is pushing the bit of gum further back every time I brush my teeth. Is this helpful or simply futile in the long run as the gums crawl back? Is this possible? Ideally I would like to keep my wisdom teeth as it is the cheapest option, but at the same time would not like to continue chewing with the left side for the rest of my life.

Thank you,

Student desperate for advice

Answer

Dear Student desperate for advice,

Here's some good news for you: the Morningside campus Columbia University Student Health Insurance Plan [2] and the Medical Center Student Insurance Plan [3] does, indeed, cover wisdom tooth (or teeth!) extraction if the wisdom tooth is impacted. Now, because you?re already experiencing some pain and problems associated with chewing food, it?s important to schedule an appointment with your dentist as soon as possible. In very severe cases, impacted wisdom teeth that are left untreated can cause oral bacteria to enter and travel through your bloodstream, causing systemic infections of the heart and kidneys. This is not good news. So, schedule that appointment to get yourself checked out. In the meantime, do not attempt to push your gums back with your toothbrush. This could cause gum damage, complicating wisdom tooth extraction surgery.

Wisdom teeth, or third molars, are quite temperamental compared to their incisor and canine
counterparts. In many cases, wisdom teeth don’t have enough room to grow in properly, causing a host of related oral health issues such as bacterial infection (pericoronitis), impaction, cysts, and crooked teeth. Wisdom tooth extraction is a common solution to many of these problems. However, a dentist must evaluate the position and health of your unique set of wisdom teeth to determine whether extraction is necessary.

As mentioned before, Columbia’s Student Health Insurance Plan [2] for students on the Morningside campus covers impacted wisdom teeth extraction in addition to other dental services, including treatment of dental abscesses and accidental injuries to sound, natural teeth. Columbia students can also opt for Columbia’s voluntary Aetna Advantage Dental Coverage [4] option if frequent dentist visits are anticipated. If you are a student at the Medical Center campus, impacted wisdom teeth extraction is covered, but you are also eligible to enroll in either the Columbia Dental Associates Student Dental Plan [5] or the Aetna Advantage Plan [6] if you would like additional coverage.

For additional information about whether or not wisdom teeth should be removed, check out the Go Ask Alice! Q&A Wisdom teeth ? must I get them removed? [7]

Your dentist may decide that there’s no harm in keeping your wisdom teeth. Even so, it’s important to have them x-rayed every year to preserve the health of your teeth and gum tissue. Biannual professional cleanings are also recommended.

Even if a person isn’t experiencing pain in relation to his or her emerging wisdom teeth, s/he is still at risk for all the oral health complications. The American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons [8] and the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Foundation [9] recommends that all young adults get their wisdom teeth evaluated by a dentist or oral surgeon, even if discomfort is not an issue. The risk for oral disease increases with time if impacted wisdom teeth are not removed by the age of 25.

For those readers who are not Columbia students enrolled in the Columbia Student Health Insurance Plan, there are services available to help with the cost of wisdom tooth extraction. Check out the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research [10] website to find low-cost dentists and other dental health resources near you. If you’re a New York City resident, check out the question Dental Care in NYC [11] from the Go Ask Alice! archives for more resources.

Chew carefully on the above information and best of luck figuring out your next move!

Take care,

Alice!

Category:
General Health [12]
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