

Pericoronitis

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

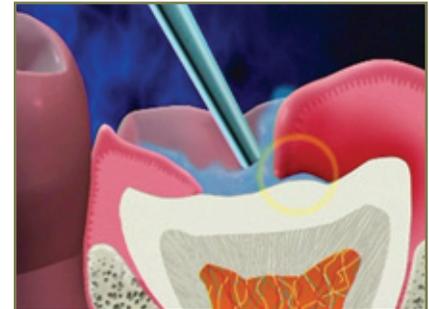
You may realize you have pericoronitis when your back gums are swollen, red, and painful. You may also have a bad taste, pus or odor in your mouth, or difficulty opening your mouth wide.



Gums partially covering molar



Plaque trapped beneath gum flap



Removing plaque

What causes pericoronitis?

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

Before a molar comes in, gum tissue completely covers the area. As the molar begins coming in, part of the tooth remains covered by a flap of gum tissue, making it very easy for food and bacteria to get trapped beneath the flap. Infection and inflammation can quickly develop in these hard-to-reach places.

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

Treating pericoronitis

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

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

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

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