Dental extraction and diving

I’m 20 years old and will be having four wisdom teeth (third molars) removed soon. I understand I’ll have air pockets where my teeth were, and I assume those could cause problems while diving. How long should I stay out of the water?

Answer from DAN experts:

Following an uncomplicated dental extraction, four to six weeks is normally sufficient time for the risk of infection to resolve. This assumes good healing and that gum tissue has filled in the empty sockets, eliminating any air pockets. An unhealed socket can be a route for infection as well as for air to enter subcutaneous tissues and cause further injury. Pain medication can impair your judgment underwater, so wait at least a couple of days after you finish taking it to resume diving. Following the extraction of upper wisdom teeth, the dentist should verify that there is no sinus involvement. The root tip of a molar can breach the maxillary sinus floor, resulting in a communication (abnormal connection) between the mouth and the sinus. This is not common, but if it occurs it will further delay your return to diving. If there is sinus involvement, you should wait until the fistula (hole) is closed and healed before you resume diving. Your dentist or oral surgeon will be able to tell you how long this should take. Discomfort, tenderness or delayed healing can make it difficult to hold a regulator mouthpiece, depending on the tooth or teeth involved and the length of the mouthpiece’s flanges. After your dentist or endodontist approves a return to diving, consider taking your scuba gear to a local pool. Swim laps underwater to confirm that breathing through your regulator does not cause any discomfort.