

Baby Dental Care

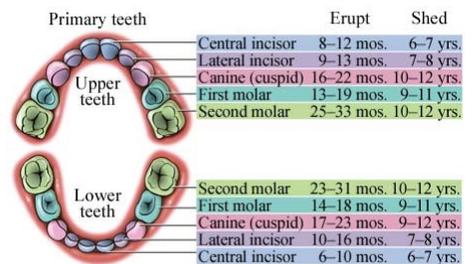


Healthy teeth are the start to a healthy childhood because kids need healthy teeth for chewing, speaking clearly and smiling. As a parent, you play a vital role in helping your children develop strong healthy teeth and good dental health habits that they will carry for a lifetime. It's up to you to set a good example for regular brushing, preventive care dental visits and a healthy diet.

When will baby teeth appear?

The front four teeth (two top and two bottom) are normally the first to appear. This usually occurs between 6 and 12 months of age. Sore gums that appear red or swollen often accompany "teething" and it's common for babies to be irritable and miserable for a few days before and after the teeth break through the gum. Teething rings and topical gels can be purchased for most pharmacies to assist with the discomfort of the teething process.

By three years of age your child should have a full set of 20 primary or baby teeth. While these teeth will eventually be replaced by adult or permanent teeth, it is important to look after baby teeth. They guide the direction of the adult teeth, so if baby teeth are lost before they should be, adult teeth can come through crooked.

A diagram showing the eruption and shedding of primary teeth. It features a top-down view of a child's mouth with 20 teeth highlighted in different colors. Lines connect each tooth to a table on the right. The table lists the tooth type, eruption age, and shedding age.

| Primary teeth | Erupt | Shed |
|-----------------|------------|------------|
| Central incisor | 8-12 mos. | 6-7 yrs. |
| Lateral incisor | 9-13 mos. | 7-8 yrs. |
| Canine (cuspid) | 16-22 mos. | 10-12 yrs. |
| First molar | 13-19 mos. | 9-11 yrs. |
| Second molar | 25-33 mos. | 10-12 yrs. |
| Second molar | 23-31 mos. | 10-12 yrs. |
| First molar | 14-18 mos. | 9-11 yrs. |
| Canine (cuspid) | 17-23 mos. | 9-12 yrs. |
| Lateral incisor | 10-16 mos. | 7-8 yrs. |
| Central incisor | 6-10 mos. | 6-7 yrs. |

When do baby teeth fall out?

Once your child is five or six years old, baby teeth will start to 'wobble' and be replaced by permanent or adult teeth. This process continues until the wisdom teeth appear at around age 16. By then, your child will have a full set of 32 permanent teeth.

The process of replacing baby teeth is gradual, and cleaning can often be challenging. The unevenness of the large teeth next to small baby teeth means that there are spaces for food and plaque to collect. It is important that you help your child to brush and floss their teeth during this stage.

How can I prevent decay in my child's teeth?

- Teaching your child to brush their own teeth is important, but you must supervise and assist. Children are prone to decay because they eat more frequently and they often have difficulty reaching some areas in their mouth.

- You must brush their teeth at least twice a day using a fluoride toothpaste.
- Allow only water to be drunk from bottles during the day.
- Milk and juice should not be given to children in bottles during the day or at bed time.
- Introduce your child to tooth brushing as soon as the teeth appear. Use a soft cloth initially then replace it with a correct size toothbrush as more teeth appear.
- Avoid sweet snacks and sweet drinks between meals. The possibility of tooth decay is directly related to the number of times that sweet things are in contact with the teeth.

When should my child have their first dental visit?

Your children are welcome to attend your preventive care visits at any age you like. Children will become familiar with the dental surgery environment and some of the dental team by attending regularly with you. We recommend that your child has their first preventive care appointment at around 2 years of age. This should be a fun visit with lots of praise and the children will be given an opportunity to explore the dental surgery and some of the noises that exist. The dentist will check the child's teeth for areas of decay and the hygienist will show the child how to brush their teeth and give the teeth a gentle polish. We will discuss fluoride, protective sealants and any tooth and jaw development issues you may have. Children also receive a take home bag of dental 'goodies'.

Do children need to floss?

Absolutely. Flossing helps to remove any food and plaque that are trapped between the teeth and in hard to reach places. If food and plaque are not removed, bacteria forms and leads to tooth decay and gum disease. Flossing is particularly important if crowding is present in the teeth, or if adult teeth come through crooked. We will show you how to help your child floss their teeth during their preventive care appointment.

What if my child has decay?

Decay caught early can usually be successfully treated with a small composite restoration or filling. Often no local anaesthetic is needed and most children tolerate this well. If the decay is more advance, the pulp of the tooth may need to be removed, and in cases where an abscess has formed, the entire tooth may need to be extracted. If your child has had an area of decay, your dentist may recommend protective sealants to stop decay forming in other teeth. Fluoride may also be recommended to help strengthen the outer enamel on the teeth.

What if my child is scared of the dentist?

Fear comes about through a previous bad experience, so many adults have a fear of the dentist because of something that happened when they were young. Be positive with your children, they haven't had a bad experience to create the fear. Modern dentistry is very different to when you were young so there is nothing to fear anymore. Encourage your children to have healthy dental habits, and they will never need to know the fear you did.