



The Importance of Caring for Baby Teeth

Baby teeth are only around for a short time. So, it's easy to assume that because they fall out and are replaced by new ones, they're not important. But they're really important. They have a long-term effect on a child's development and healthy smile.

In this video, kids will learn that baby teeth help young kids speak clearly, express emotions through smiling and chew properly. They'll also learn that cavities or missing teeth can make it difficult to eat certain foods.

Here is some good background information to share with the class as you watch this video on baby teeth:

- This first set of teeth is essential for language development as well as being able to eat properly.
- Baby teeth also serve another very important purpose: they save space for the child's future permanent teeth.
- A baby tooth is intended to remain in the child's mouth until a permanent tooth underneath it is ready to take its place.
- The roots of the baby tooth dissolve causing the tooth to become loose and fall out. The permanent tooth typically appears within a few weeks.

Additionally, here is a tooth development timeline to help you and your class understand better what is happening with baby teeth before and after they erupt:

Teeth before birth

The soft tissues of teeth start to form just six to eight weeks into pregnancy. After three or four months, the hard tissue begins to develop. By the time a child is born, the crowns of 20 baby teeth are nearly completely formed. They usually aren't visible though because they haven't emerged from the jawbone.

Occasionally a child has one or more teeth showing at birth.

Gradually, the teeth that formed under the gums begin to emerge. Baby teeth, also known as primary teeth, generally begin to show up somewhere between six to 12 months after the child is born. By the time a child is 3 years old, usually all their 20 baby teeth have erupted — with 10 in the upper jaw and 10 in the lower jaw.

Primary teeth typically emerge in this order:

- Eight incisors (front teeth) from 6 to 16 months old, usually beginning with a middle tooth on the lower jaw
- Four first molars (near the back of the mouth) from 13 to 19 months old
- Four canines (pointed teeth, also known as cuspids, next to the incisors) from 16 to 23 months old
- Four second molars (at the very back of the mouth) from 23 to 33 months old

For more dental health educational resources, go to www.healthysmilelearning.org. Healthy Smile Learning is an outreach effort of Arizona PBS on behalf of the Delta Dental Institute.

Baby teeth are generally smaller than the adult teeth that will replace them. Growth of the jawbones will typically allow space for permanent teeth. Check with your dentist or orthodontist around age 7 to determine if early orthodontic care would be beneficial.

While they may only be temporary, it's important that baby teeth be kept clean and healthy. Baby teeth help children chew easily and speak correctly and help maintain space for the permanent teeth. Healthy teeth also keep children from experiencing mouth pain and cavities. A decayed baby tooth could cause an infection that damages the permanent tooth developing underneath.

In addition to daily oral hygiene, kids should visit the dentist regularly. The first visit should occur after the first tooth emerges or no later than the first birthday.

Bye, bye, baby teeth

As their roots start to dissolve, baby teeth fall out. They are usually lost in the same order in which they came in — beginning with the incisors (front teeth) around age 6. All incisors are usually lost by age 8. The first molars are generally lost between ages 9 and 11, with the canines and second molars following shortly after. By age 12, all baby teeth have typically fallen out.

Make room for adult teeth

As baby teeth fall out and the child's jaw grows, there is room for adult (permanent) teeth to push up. People have 12 more adult teeth than baby teeth, for a total of 32 permanent teeth — 16 upper and 16 lower.

In addition to adult versions of baby teeth, permanent teeth include eight bicuspid (premolars) between the canines and molars, and four third molars (wisdom teeth) at the back of the mouth. Although some people never get their wisdom teeth or are missing at least one of these third molars.

Adult teeth usually emerge at the following ages, completing your permanent teeth by around age 21:

- First molars from ages 6 to 7
- Incisors from ages 6 to 9
- Canines from ages 9 to 12
- Premolars from ages 10 to 12
- Second molars from ages 11 to 13
- Third molars (wisdom teeth) from ages 17 to 21

Help keep your teeth healthy for a lifetime. Brush twice a day for two minutes each time, floss daily and visit your dentist regularly.

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