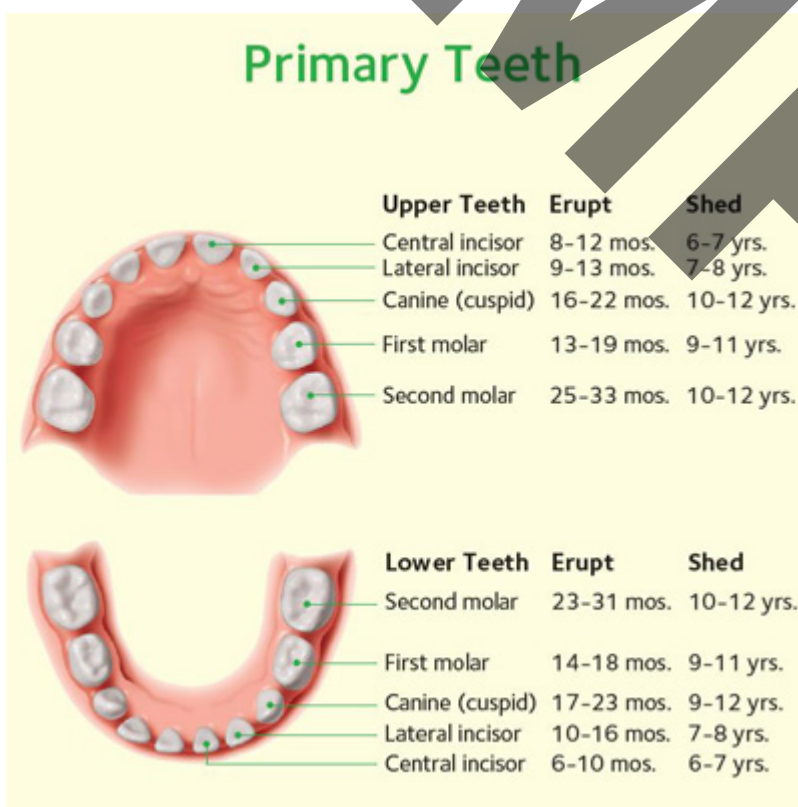


Your Child's First Dental Visit

Baby teeth, also called primary teeth, are just as important as permanent (adult) teeth. Strong, healthy primary teeth can help your child chew and speak. They also hold space in the jaws for permanent teeth that are growing under the gums.

When babies are born, they usually have 20 primary teeth that have partly formed inside the gums. The front two upper and lower teeth usually begin to come in (erupt) when the child is between six and 12 months old. Most children have a set of 20 primary teeth in their mouths by the time they are age three.

The chart below tells the names of primary teeth. The pictures show when each tooth usually erupts and is lost (shed). However, not all children get the same teeth at the same times. Your child's teeth may erupt earlier or later than shown here.



Tooth decay can occur as soon as your child's first tooth erupts. Parents may wonder why they should worry about decay in baby teeth, since they will be replaced by permanent teeth. The problem is that decay in primary teeth could mean a higher risk of decay in the permanent teeth. And if decay is severe, it can harm the child's overall health.

What causes tooth decay?

Bacteria in the mouth change the sugar in foods and drinks into acid. Each time you eat or drink, this acid can attack the teeth for 20 minutes or longer. After many attacks, tooth decay can develop and lead to cavities.

Children are at higher risk for decay if their teeth are exposed to sugar often or for long periods of time. Babies should not be put to bed with a bottle. If your baby falls asleep with the bottle in his mouth, the liquid can pool around the teeth. Liquids such as fruit juice, soda and other sweetened liquids all contain sugar. For this same reason, children should not be allowed to constantly sip on sugary drinks or snack on sugary foods.

Meet the Dentist

Protect your child's teeth by starting dental checkups early. The American Dental Association and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry say that **the first dental visit should occur within six months after the baby's first tooth appears, but no later than the child's first birthday.** It's best to meet the dentist when your child is having no dental problems—don't wait until an emergency comes up.

Why schedule a visit so early? A dentist can show you how to clean your child's teeth, discuss diet and fluoride needs and recommend oral care products. He or she can answer your questions about your baby's teeth, just like a well-baby visit with your pediatrician. The dentist also checks for problems, such as tooth decay.

Having a well-baby checkup at this age also connects your child to a dental home. This is a "home base" for dental care, a place where you can take your child from year to year. This helps the dentist get to know your child's and your family's specific needs, so he or she can provide the best care.

If your child is a toddler, a dentist will gently examine their teeth and gums, looking for decay and other problems. If necessary, the child's teeth may be cleaned. Your toddler can also be checked for problems related to habits such as prolonged thumb or finger sucking.

Two more important ways a dentist can prevent cavities include **fluoride treatments** and **dental sealants**, a coating that protects the chewing surfaces of the back teeth. Your dentist will let you know if these treatments are right for your child.

Each child has different oral health needs. But it's almost always true that preventive care from your dentist can save time, money and teeth. Your dentist will recommend a schedule for your child's dental visits.



Moderate decay

Tips for a Positive Dental Visit

- Schedule your child's first visit between the arrival of the first tooth and his first birthday.
- If possible, schedule a morning appointment when children tend to be rested and cooperative.
- Stay positive! The dentist will help to keep your child's teeth healthy; keep to yourself any anxiety that you might feel about dental visits.
- Never bribe your child to go to the dentist or use the visit as a punishment or threat!

Finally, try to make your child's dental visit an enjoyable outing. Teaching your child good oral hygiene habits early can lead to a lifetime of good dental health.

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