

## Primary and permanent teeth

### Does my dentist play a role in my child's tooth development?

Yes! Your child's first visit to the dentist should happen before his or her first birthday. Taking your child to the dentist at a young age is the best way to prevent problems such as tooth decay, and can help parents learn how to clean their child's teeth and identify his or her fluoride needs. After all, decay can occur as soon as teeth appear. Bringing your child to the dentist early often leads to a lifetime of good oral care habits and acclimates your child to the dental office, thereby reducing anxiety and fear, which will make for plenty of stress-free visits in the future.

### Why are primary teeth important?

Though you lose them early in life, your primary teeth, also called baby teeth, were essential in the development and placement of your permanent teeth. Primary teeth maintain the spaces where permanent teeth will erupt and help develop proper speech patterns

that would otherwise be difficult without maintenance of the space; crowding and misalignment can occur, resulting in more complicated treatment later. Baby teeth also are good primers for teaching your child good oral care habits. It is important to take care of your child's primary teeth. Even though primary teeth last only a few years, decay, cavities and infection can take its toll, and may require expensive treatment to repair.

### When do baby teeth come in?

Your child's primary teeth generally make their appearance when he or she is six or seven months old, though it can occur as early as birth. There are 20 primary teeth followed by 32 permanent teeth that will eventually replace them. Your child should have all his or her primary teeth at age three and will keep them until age five or six when they begin to loosen and fall out. This process usually lasts until the child is 12 or 13. Primary

teeth fall out because permanent teeth are pushing them, and by about age 14 children have a full set of 28 permanent teeth, plus four additional teeth, called wisdom teeth that grow behind the permanent teeth in late adolescence for a total of 32.

### What can relieve my child's discomfort?

Between the ages of six months and three years, your child may experience sore gums and general oral discomfort as primary teeth erupt. While some lucky children experience no apparent discomfort during eruption, many others do. Signs that eruption is causing discomfort in your child include crankiness, lack of appetite, excessive drooling, fever, restless behavior, pink or red cheeks, coughing, upset stomach, and chewing or sucking of fingers and toys. There are ways you can bring your child relief. A cold, wet cloth for your baby to suck on can soothe gums. There are also teething accessories and toys your child can chew on to relieve discomfort. Thumb

sucking also brings relief, however, dentists recommend this practice should cease upon the arrival of the first set of permanent teeth or by age 3, so it does not interfere with the normal development of a child's oral cavity.

### Should loose primary teeth be pulled?

Losing primary teeth before they are ready to fall out can affect the proper positioning of the permanent teeth. If a baby tooth is lost too early, other teeth may tip or fill in the vacant space, forcing permanent teeth to come in crooked. If a baby tooth is knocked out, see your dentist, who may recommend a space maintainer to reserve the gap until the permanent tooth comes in. In instances where a primary tooth is loose because of the emergence of a permanent tooth, have the child wiggle the tooth or eat something hard, such as an apple to help it along. Once the shell of the tooth is disconnected from the root, the discomfort in extracting a loose primary tooth is minimal.