



# When Children Begin to Lose their Baby Teeth

## When will my child start losing his baby teeth? How can I be sure his adult teeth stay healthy?

Erupting permanent teeth cause the roots of baby teeth to be reabsorbed so that by the time they are loose there is little holding them in place besides a small amount of tissue. Most children lose their baby teeth in this order:



- Baby teeth ordinarily are shed first at about age 6 when the incisors, the middle teeth in front, become loose.
- Molars, in the back, are usually shed between ages 10 and 12, and are replaced with permanent teeth by about age 13.

Children usually wiggle their teeth loose with their tongues or fingers, eager to hide them under their pillow for the "tooth fairy." If your child wants you to pull out the already loose tooth, grasp it firmly with a piece of tissue or gauze and remove it with a quick twist. Occasionally, if a primary tooth is not loosening sufficiently on its own, your child's dentist may suggest extracting it.

If your child loses his baby teeth by decay or accident too early, his permanent teeth can erupt prematurely and come in crooked because of limited space. According to orthodontists, 30 percent of their cases have their origins in the premature loss of baby teeth.

## Brushing and flossing

Your child may need some help brushing until he is between ages 7 and 10. Even if his intentions are good, he may not have the dexterity to clean his teeth well. Ideally, the teeth should be brushed within five minutes to 10 minutes after eating. Also, for long-term dental health, your child needs to care for his gums as well; he should be taught to floss regularly, preferably once a day, in order to help prevent gum (or periodontal) disease in adulthood.

A tartar-control toothpaste can help keep plaque from adhering to your child's teeth. Also, fluoride in the toothpaste can strengthen the exposed outer enamel of the youngster's teeth and help prevent cavities. Fluoride also has been added to the water supply in many cities. If your own tap water has less than the recommended levels of this nutrient, your pediatrician may suggest that you add fluoride to your child's diet beginning at age 6 months, often as part of a vitamin supplement. Fluoride treatment should continue until age 16. Ask your doctor or dentist for guidance.

## Dental checkups

Make sure your youngster has dental checkups twice a year for cleaning, as well as for X-rays as recommended by your dentist. Parents may choose to utilize a pedodontist, a dentist with special interest and expertise in children's dentistry. Regular preventive appointments will significantly decrease your child's chances of ever having to undergo major dental treatment. Also, contact your dentist whenever your child complains of a toothache. This pain could be a sign of a decayed tooth. Until the dentist can see your child, treat the pain with acetaminophen by mouth.

## Preventing cavities

Your dentist may also suggest placing sealants on your child's molars. These thin plastic coatings prevent plaque from accumulating and becoming trapped in the pits and fissures of the teeth. They are appropriate for all rear teeth that have grooves in them, and because they are extremely successful in preventing cavities, they are cost-effective too. Sealants may need to be reapplied during adolescence. With a combination of sealants and fluoride treatment, the incidence of cavities can be reduced by 90 percent.

Also play a role in healthy teeth. In particular, minimize your child's contact with high-sugar and sticky sweets and starchy carbohydrates. Cut back on snacking on sweets between meals, when these foods are more likely to linger in the mouth without brushing.

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