



Losing Baby Teeth: What You Should Know

Understand why children lose their baby teeth, when it should be expected

Why Do We Have Baby Teeth?

The development of baby teeth, also known as primary, milk, or deciduous teeth, is a common occurrence throughout the animal kingdom, particularly in mammals. Humans are no exception.

Baby teeth start developing beneath the gums in utero, but generally won't start erupting until the child is about six months old. Between the ages of six months and three years, a total of 20 baby teeth will erupt. These baby teeth aren't just a practice set, rather, they work as placeholders for the larger, permanent, adult teeth that will show up later, when the child's mouth is generally large enough to accommodate them. Baby teeth are also essential in speech development and digestion.

When a younger child has a baby tooth extracted for any reason, that placeholder is gone. To keep the space ready for the permanent tooth to erupt, the dentist will often place a space maintainer in the area where the tooth was pulled.

When Do Children Lose Their Baby Teeth?

Children will generally start to lose their baby teeth around six years of age, usually in the same order as when the teeth first erupted. All baby teeth are usually lost by age 12.

When the permanent teeth hiding below the gums are ready to start coming in, the roots of the baby tooth above it will start to dissolve, eventually leaving the baby tooth attached only by the gum tissue surrounding the tooth. Without the root to stabilize the tooth, it may wiggle or become loose

What Should be Done When a Baby Tooth Comes Out?

It isn't unusual for children to experience some discomfort, pain, or even some light bleeding when a baby tooth comes out.

The first thing to do is clean the area of the missing tooth by rinsing gently with some warm salt water. If there is still bleeding, place a small amount of gauze over the area, applying light pressure until the bleeding stops. Once the bleeding stops, any discomfort can be treated by applying a wet (cold) cloth to the site, which will help to reduce any minor swelling that may occur from the tooth coming out.

When Should I Call a Dentist?

There are some cases where one, a few, or all of a person's baby teeth don't fall out. Sometimes the permanent tooth is missing. In other situations, the permanent tooth/teeth waiting to erupt below grow in front of or behind the baby teeth, if at all, causing misalignment issues and crowding.



Should a Loose Tooth be Pulled?

Though a loose tooth can cause some discomfort or annoyance while eating, loose teeth shouldn't be pulled using string or floss. To see if a loose tooth is truly ready to come out, the child's parent or caretaker can place tissue over the tooth and gently squeeze. If the tooth pops out, it was ready, if not, more time should be allowed.

Most children start losing their baby teeth around age six, but every child is different. If your child's teeth were slow to come in, they will likely take a little longer to lose. However, if your child hasn't hit their tooth eruption or shedding milestones within a year of the timelines listed below, you should address it with your child's dentist.

Regardless of any concerns you may have with the eruption or shedding of your child's teeth, routine check-ups with the dentist will keep your child on the right path to dental health. The child should have their first dental appointment scheduled by their first birthday, and every six months after.



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