



Baby Teeth are Important

Early and regular dental care are essential for the maintenance of good healthy teeth. Baby teeth require the attention of a dentist as much as adult teeth. Healthy baby teeth are important for chewing food and they assist in normal speech. They are very important in the growth and development of the jaw and face. Baby teeth also help guide adult teeth into their proper position. Early loss of one or more baby teeth may result in crowded adult teeth.

Dental disease may attack children's teeth as soon as they appear in the mouth. Acids formed by germs feeding on food particles containing sugar, cause tooth cavities or decay. Tooth decay can be painful, may cause sleeping problems and poor self esteem, lead to infection and tooth loss and can be expensive to treat.

To prevent cavities, follow these steps:

- 1. Help your child choose food that keeps their teeth healthy.** Milk, fruit, vegetables, whole grain cereals, meat, fish, poultry, cheese and eggs help form and maintain healthy teeth. Sweet and sticky foods, especially between meals, are the major cause of dental decay. Give your child milk instead of soft drinks, peanut butter sandwiches instead of cookies, crackers and cheese instead of candies, or fruit instead of cake as a snack between meals.
- 2. Keep your child's teeth clean.** Teeth must be brushed before bed and right after meals. When brushing isn't possible, children should be taught to rinse their mouths out with water. It is recommended that parents and/or caregivers brush their children's teeth until the children are old enough to write (not print) their names.
- 3. Protect your child's teeth with fluoride.** Fluoride combines with tooth enamel to make teeth more resistant to dental decay. Fluoride is present in Toronto's drinking water and is available in toothpastes recommended by the Canadian Dental Association. Use toothpaste with fluoride when your child is old enough to spit it out on command. If the child is unable to spit it out, do not use toothpaste. Instead, brush their teeth with only a toothbrush and water.
- 4. Make sure children visit the dentist early and frequently,** starting at the age of 12 months. If you can't afford a dentist and don't have dental insurance, your local public health unit can help.



If this baby tooth is lost early because of dental disease...



The tooth beside it may grow at an angle into the space, preventing the permanent tooth from growing into the mouth.



To prevent this, a dentist may place a "space maintainer", to hold the space open until the permanent tooth grows into it.