

# Your Child's Teeth 6-12



**ADA** American Dental Association®  
America's leading advocate for oral health

## Diet

A healthy diet is essential for a child's growth and development. Like the rest of the body, the teeth, bones and the soft tissues of the mouth need a well-balanced diet. Children should eat a variety of foods from the five major food groups in line with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Pyramid. They include:

- fruits
- vegetables
- breads, cereals and other grain products
- milk, cheese and yogurt
- meat, poultry, fish and alternates, such as dry beans and peas, eggs and nuts

What we eat, and how often, can affect our teeth. That's because plaque, a sticky film of bacteria, constantly forms on the teeth. When we eat food or drink beverages that contain sugar, the bacteria produce acids that can attack tooth enamel. The stickiness of plaque keeps the harmful acids against the teeth, which can contribute to tooth decay.

Frequent snacking may mean frequent acid attacks and an increased risk for tooth decay. Other factors that increase the likelihood of tooth decay are the amount of bacteria in your mouth and lack of exposure to fluoride. Limit snacks. If your child does need a snack between meals, offer nutritious foods from the main food groups.

## A Few Last Words

Practicing good oral hygiene and having a nutritious, balanced diet are important for children. You should also talk to your child about the dangers of tobacco at an early age. The use of tobacco (even smokeless tobacco) can quickly become addictive and may lead to serious health consequences including a number of types of cancer.

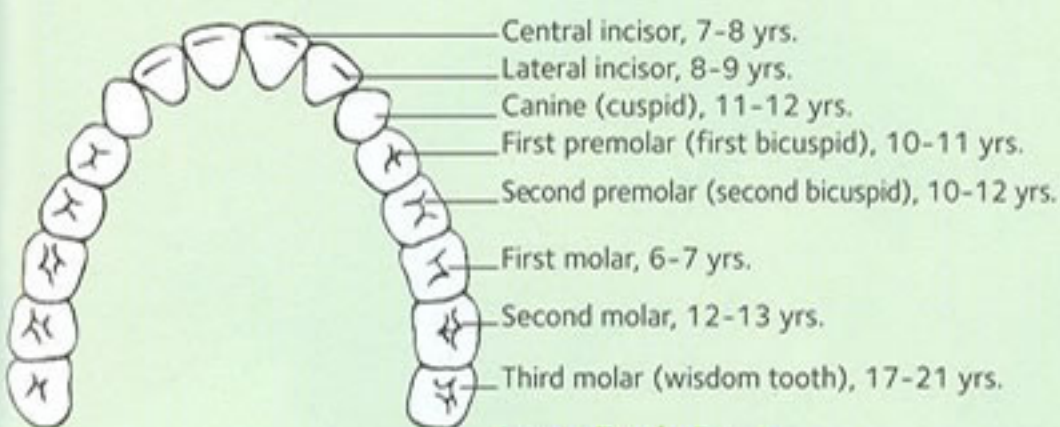
Oral piercing is another topic of which parents should be aware and discuss with their children. Oral piercing should be discouraged because the mouth contains millions of bacteria and infection can be a complication.

*Don't wait to take your child to the dentist until pain or a dental emergency happens. Regular dental checkups and professional cleanings can help provide your child with a lifetime of healthy smiles.*

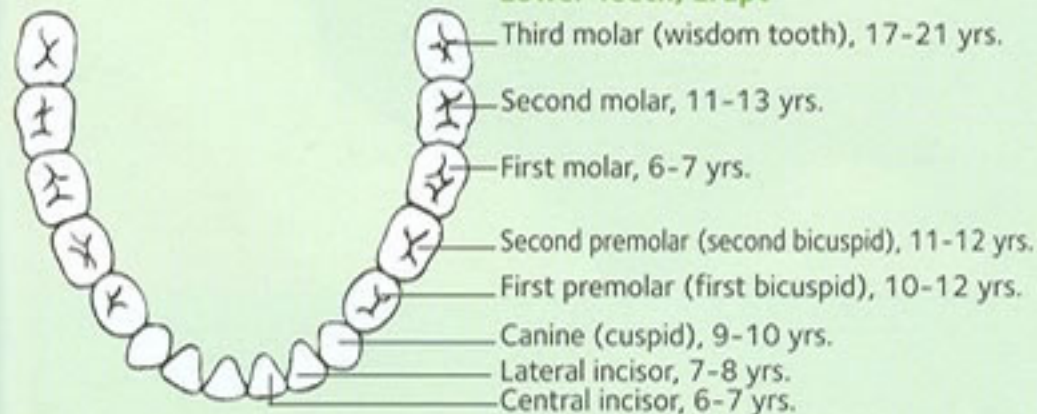
The first permanent molars usually emerge between ages five and six. For that reason, they often are called the six-year molars. The six-year molars help determine the shape of the lower face. They also affect the position and health of other adult teeth. These adult teeth are sometimes mistaken for baby teeth. They must be cared for properly if they are to last throughout the child's lifetime.

## Permanent Teeth

### Upper Teeth, Erupt



### Lower Teeth, Erupt



## Sealants

A sealant is a material that is applied to the teeth where decay occurs most often — the chewing surfaces of the back teeth. These teeth have pits and grooves that are difficult to keep clean, because toothbrush bristles cannot reach into them. The sealant — a plastic resin — bonds into the pits and grooves and acts as a barrier, protecting enamel from plaque and acids.

Sealing a tooth is fast and painless. Sealants may last several years before they need to be reapplied. Ask your dentist if sealants will help your child.

## Braces

Malocclusion, or bad bite, is a condition in which the teeth are crowded, crooked or out of alignment, or the jaws don't meet properly. This condition may become particularly noticeable between the ages of six and 12, when the adult or permanent teeth are erupting.

There are problems that can occur with a malocclusion:

- It's more difficult to keep teeth and gums clean, and this may increase the risk of tooth decay and gum disease.
- Crooked, crowded teeth may also interfere with the proper development of the jaws.
- Some more severe malocclusions may actually interfere with eating and normal speech.
- And teeth that are out of position are more likely to have abnormal wear than healthy, aligned teeth.

Early examination and treatment may help prevent, or reduce the severity of, malocclusions in the permanent teeth.

The developing bite should be monitored by a dentist or orthodontist throughout tooth eruption. Starting treatment or preventive care at the best time may reduce overall treatment time and result in the best outcome. In some cases, preventive orthodontic treatment may be started when the primary teeth are still in place. Depending on the bite correction needed, different types of orthodontic appliances, including some that are removable, are used to prevent and treat problems. Keeping teeth clean and having regular dental checkups are major factors in the success of the child's orthodontic treatment.

## Preventing Emergencies

Sports and recreational activities provide an opportunity for injury. Mouth protectors, also called mouthguards, are an important piece of protective face gear. You've probably seen mouth protectors used in contact sports, such as hockey, football or boxing. Coaches and team members know that mouth protectors cushion blows that would otherwise cause broken teeth, injuries to the lips and face and sometimes even jaw fractures.

Non-contact sports such as soccer, volleyball and gymnastics and leisure activities such as bicycling, roller skating and skateboarding also place a child at risk for dental injuries. If your child takes part in these activities, ask your dentist to recommend a mouth protector.

## Brushing and Flossing

Brush and floss your child's teeth until he or she is at least six years old. By age six or seven, children should be able to brush their own teeth with supervision.

When first teaching your child how to brush, you may wish to stand behind him or her and hold the brush. This can help your child learn the correct technique.

Choose a child-sized toothbrush for ease of use. The many colors and designs available today can motivate children to keep brushing. There are also powered toothbrushes for kids, so ask your dentist if one is right for your child.

By around age 10 or 11, most children are ready to brush their teeth without supervision. Your dentist can help you determine whether your child has the skill level to brush unsupervised. Keep in mind that each child is different, and they are ready for different habits at different ages.

Your dentist and hygienist can show you and your child how to floss. Flossing removes plaque (a sticky film of bacteria) from between the teeth where toothbrush bristles can't reach. Because flossing is a difficult skill to master, you should floss your child's teeth until he or she can do it alone.

By about age 10 or 11, your child should be able to floss his or her teeth with supervision. Show the child how to hold the floss and gently clean between teeth. If you're unsure as to when your child no longer needs supervision while brushing or flossing, check with your dentist.



Look for oral hygiene products that display the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance. The Seal is your assurance that the product meets the ADA's criteria for safety and effectiveness.

### Proper brushing techniques:

1. Place the toothbrush against the gums.
2. Move the brush back and forth gently in short (tooth-wide) strokes. Brush the outer surfaces of each tooth, upper and lower. Repeat the same method in the inside surfaces and chewing surfaces of the teeth.
3. Finish by brushing the tongue to help freshen breath and remove bacteria.
4. Make sure your child brushes at least twice a day.



### Proper flossing techniques:

1. Use about a foot and a half of floss. Wind most of it around the middle fingers of both hands. Hold the floss between the thumbs and forefingers. Use a gentle, back-and-forth motion to guide the floss between the teeth.
2. Curve the floss into a C-shape and guide it into the space between the gum and tooth until you feel resistance. Gently scrape the floss against the side of the tooth.
3. Repeat these steps on each tooth. Don't forget the backs of the last teeth in each corner of the mouth.
4. Floss once a day.

