

Common questions

Why does my child have baby teeth?

The mouth of a young (pre-school) child is just too small to be able to fit in all their adult teeth, so they have a set of smaller, baby teeth to use while they grow. These teeth start to appear at six months of age, and are all in by 2½ years of age. The baby teeth start to be replaced by adult teeth around six years of age, with the last ones (right at the back) being lost around 12 years of age.

If baby teeth fall out anyway, why is it important to keep them healthy?

Firstly, and most importantly, a decayed baby tooth can cause a child severe pain, and can lead to a serious mouth infection. Often, the only way of managing a young child with toothache is to take out teeth under a general anaesthetic.

Secondly, baby teeth keep the space for adult teeth to come into. If baby teeth are taken out early, it increases the chance that the child will have crowded adult teeth, and will need to have some adult teeth taken out and orthodontic (tooth-straightening) treatment with a brace.

Why can baby teeth cause my child pain and abscesses if they become decayed?

This is because all baby teeth have a hollow space inside them, which is filled with the tooth's nerve. The nerve is close to the surface of the tooth, and if it decays, the nerve will become swollen. This can be very painful. Left untreated, the nerve will die and become infected, and the infection will spread through the roots of the tooth and into the child's jaw.

Isn't it easy just to take a baby tooth out if it causes my child pain?

Unfortunately, it isn't easy to take a baby tooth out of a young child's mouth. As you can see from the photograph, the roots of baby teeth can be very long, and reach far down inside the child's jawbone.

To take the tooth out, the dentist will have to give the child an injection in the gum on both sides of the tooth. The dentist will then have to push very hard with forceps on the tooth to loosen it in the jawbone before taking it out. Many young children find the pushing and noises to be quite upsetting.



A baby back molar tooth

Do decayed baby teeth always have to be taken out?

No, not at all. If you take your child to the dentist regularly for check-up appointments, the baby teeth can be treated before they cause problems. For the treatment to be successful, the patient or carer of the child must look after the child's teeth for them.

When should I take my child to the dentist?

As early as possible, and certainly by the time their first teeth start to appear.

What can I do to stop decay in my child's baby teeth?

Help your child to brush their teeth twice a day, with a smear or pea-sized amount of toothpaste (1,000ppm fluoride) depending on their age. Make sure they spit it out and do not rinse their mouth after brushing. Allow them to have only water or milk to drink between meals, limit sugary snacks to mealtimes and take your child to the dentist regularly.

