Why Baby Teeth Are Important ?

Primary or “baby” teeth are important for many reasons. Not only do they help children speak clearly and chew naturally, they also aid in forming a path that permanent teeth can follow when they are ready to erupt. In fact, healthy baby teeth are just as essential to infants and young kids as healthy permanent teeth are to older kids and adults.

Visiting The Pediatric Dentist Early

Usually, primary teeth begin to erupt somewhere between the age of 6 months and 1 year. It is advised that children receive their first examination from a dentist preferably within 6 months of the appearance of the first tooth and no later than the first birthday. A visit to the dentist this early is known as a “well-baby checkup.” The Pediatric Dentist will examine the child for any tooth decay or other problems, can explain the proper way of brushing the child’s teeth, and will advise the parent on any negatively impacting habits the child may have formed, such as going to sleep with a bottle or thumb sucking. By 3 years old, the majority of children have a full set of 20 baby teeth.

Healthy Baby Teeth And Overall Well-Being

Since baby teeth ultimately fall out, many people believe they do not matter. Good oral health in a child’s early years however, is extremely important for a child’s overall well being, among other things. Healthy primary teeth are significant for preliminary physical, emotional, and social development.

Healthy baby teeth aid physical, emotional, and social development by:

- Promoting excellent nutrition through proper chewing
- Helping the initiation and development of speech
- Allowing a child to learn well and pay attention in school without the hindrance of dental pain
- Raising self-esteem by providing a bright and beautiful smile

Healthy Baby Teeth Save Space For Permanent Teeth

Primary, or baby teeth, hold the space in the jaws that is required for the correct development of adult (permanent) teeth. Typically, under the healthiest circumstances, a baby tooth stays in the child's mouth until the permanent tooth underneath is about to surface through the gums. When the permanent tooth is ready to emerge, the roots of the primary tooth break down or disintegrate, and the baby tooth gets loose and falls out. Usually, the permanent tooth then starts coming in a few weeks later.

Losing a baby tooth too early, before the adult tooth is ready to emerge, can cause major spatial problems for permanent teeth, unless specific action is taken. If a baby tooth falls out too early naturally, is knocked out accidentally, or must be extracted by the dentist due to decay or other disease, the space where that tooth is lost must be preserved.

In this situation, the Pediatric Dentist will insert a space maintainer to fill the place of the primary tooth until the permanent tooth becomes ready to erupt.

A space maintainer is a small device that surrounds the permanent tooth and the space that needs to be retained. Essentially, it is an appliance that is custom made by the Pediatric Dentist out of metal or acrylic material. A space maintainer can be either cemented in the child's mouth or removable. The space maintainers keeps the other teeth from straying, tipping, or crowding into the empty space and holds it open until the permanent tooth can emerge.

Because baby teeth are so important even to the development of jawbones and muscles, it is also crucial that they correctly guide the adult teeth into position. If no intervention occurs in the space where a baby tooth falls out or is removed too early, the teeth on either side of the open space may shift and invade that empty space, potentially causing multiple problems. In this case, there may not be enough room for the permanent tooth to erupt properly, and it may emerge out of its correct position and negatively affect the positioning of other teeth. If the teeth become overcrowded and out of alignment, they become harder to keep clean, which

enhances a child’s risk for dental disease. This also increases their chances of needing more orthodontic treatment in the future.