



by Ian Sweeney

# REMEMBER PRIMARY TEETH!

**IT IS A** common misconception that a child's first teeth are not important as they will eventually be lost and replaced by permanent teeth. As a result, many children do not receive dental care at an early age, often waiting until their permanent teeth erupt.

A child's first teeth are just as important as their permanent teeth. Untreated dental infection in a baby tooth has the potential to hospitalise a child with acute infection or facial swelling. A child's first set of teeth are not only necessary for a child to speak and chew, they help maintain space for the permanent teeth to erupt.

A child has 20 baby teeth that are replaced by 32 permanent teeth. The 12 permanent molar teeth erupt into the mouth behind the baby teeth. As a child grows, the roots of the baby teeth are dissolved by pressure from the erupting permanent teeth. This

process follows a precise timeline with each baby tooth being lost at a particular time.

Premature loss of a baby tooth may have a dramatic result on the eruption pattern of the permanent teeth. For example, should a baby molar tooth be lost, the first permanent molar tooth may drift forward to fill the space where the baby tooth was lost. This forward movement of the permanent molar may block the pathway of another permanent tooth.



These problems can be avoided by regular routine dental care, including flossing of the baby teeth. Should a tooth be lost prematurely, the use of a space maintainer may be required to help maintain the available space. Space maintainers are small metal devices that are cemented onto the adjacent teeth, to stop any tooth movement until the permanent tooth begins to erupt.

The Australian Dental Association recommends a child's first dental visit should occur around 12 months of age. This visit is important to ensure parents are on the right track with their child's dental care, dietary advice and of course reinforce the need for regular return dental care.

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