

TEETHING *Matters...*



Many parents don't realise the importance of baby teeth feeling they are disposable. Baby teeth, or primary teeth, have the following functions:

- Help to chew food properly
- Help with speech
- Help in the normal development of the jaw bones and facial muscles
- Maintain space for the permanent teeth and help guide them
- Help provide facial aesthetics

Decay in a baby tooth can cause pain in that tooth.

This can progress to **infection** beyond it **into the adjoining bone/gums, developing permanent teeth underneath**, and can in some instances also **lead to facial swelling and high temperatures**. In extreme cases **infection can travel from the face to the brain**. If a primary tooth is lost too soon, the permanent tooth will have no guide to follow and may emerge in the wrong position, leading to **crowding and the need for future orthodontics**.

Baby teeth are quite different in their structure from permanent teeth. They are smaller and usually whiter in appearance. The outer hard layers of the primary teeth are much thinner and the 'pulp chamber' (chamber within a tooth where the blood vessels and nerves are present) much bigger, meaning **decay can travel at a faster rate to their nerves**.

Your child's family dentist should be able to help pick up a problem at regular dental check-ups and offer preventive advice and treatment. Some children have more complex problems or are very anxious. They can be referred to a specialist. **Dentists who specialise in children are called 'Paediatric Dentists'**.

Specialists in Paediatric Dentistry have specialised **knowledge and experience in the oral and dental care of children**. They have special expertise in dealing with anxious children, those with special medical needs, traumatic injuries to mouth and teeth, and management of oral and dental developmental problems.

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