

# Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles



## Understanding Why Baby Teeth Are Important

**B**aby (primary) teeth are a child's first set of teeth. A baby's teeth start to come in at 6 to 10 months. By the time a child is 2½ to 3 years old, all 20 baby teeth will have come into the mouth. Taking care of a child's baby teeth is important for the child's overall health and development.



*School readiness begins with health!*



Baby teeth are important for children to:

- **Chew and eat foods.** Children need to eat healthy foods every day to grow and be strong. Children with tooth decay are less likely to eat crunchy foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables. Being able to eat these foods promotes good nutrition and a healthy weight.
- **Speak clearly.** Children who lose baby teeth too early may have trouble making certain sounds. This can make it hard to understand the child. A child may need speech therapy to improve speech problems that may develop because of missing teeth.
- **Keep space for adult teeth.** Baby teeth hold space for adult teeth growing in the jaw. If a baby tooth is lost too early, other teeth that

are already in the mouth will move into the space. It can block out the adult tooth trying to come in and cause crowding. The upper and lower jaws may not meet properly because of the crooked teeth.

- **Stay healthy.** Tooth decay in baby teeth can lead to infections that can cause fever and pain. If not treated, the infection from tooth decay can spread to other parts of the head and neck and lead to severe swelling.
- **Have self-confidence.** Children with decayed front teeth tend to not smile or may cover their mouth when talking. Sometimes they stop playing with other children. A healthy smile helps give children the self-confidence needed to have good social experiences.



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