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The Foundation Teeth

Most parents do not worry much about the condition of the child's "baby" teeth, thinking that they are going to fall out anyway. However, specialists in pediatric dentistry consider the child's baby teeth to be the most important teeth in the mouth. What happens to them determines whether the child will face future dental problems in his or her teens and throughout adulthood.

This may sound dramatic but consider these facts:

- Unchecked tooth decay in the primary teeth can pass right along to the permanent teeth. This means that on entering their teens, children can have a mouthful of new adult teeth that are full of cavities.
- When a primary tooth becomes infected or abscessed at the root, the infection often damages the permanent tooth still forming in the child's jaw.
- When a primary tooth is knocked out or, because of an infection, is lost early, the gap in the child's mouth allows the remaining teeth to change position. The result may be the loss of the space being reserved for the underlying permanent teeth. This may mean a mouthful of crooked teeth requiring braces.

These important facts demonstrate the critical role that the primary teeth play in the development of the child's mouth and jaw. This is why in the dental profession the primary teeth are often referred to as the "foundation teeth." While children start to lose some of their primary teeth at about age six, some primary teeth remain as pillars in their mouths until the child is eleven or twelve years old.

To protect your child's primary teeth, parents should start on a program of prevention - starting with an early dental checkup. Pediatric dentists and the Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommend the first dental visit occur by the child's first birthday. At this time, the child can be started on a program of cleaning, good dietary choices and correct use of fluorides. Therefore, if there are problems - like the improper use of a nursing bottle, or nursing on demand, or sippy cup, which can be major causes of decay in baby teeth - they can be detected and treated, before they lead to more serious situations.

The importance of early dental care for your child cannot be overstated. Those baby teeth that are often ignored are the ground work for beautiful, healthy teeth that should always be there. Listed below are examples of positive benefits to having healthy baby teeth.

1. Important for normal growth and development of jaw bones and muscles.
2. Holds space for permanent teeth and guides them into position.
3. Needed for proper speech development (4 front teeth.)
4. Important for looks or aesthetics and development of a positive self-image.
5. Function in chewing foods.
6. Children are overall healthier with healthy teeth. (People with good dental health live longer.)
7. Avoid infections of baby teeth, which could damage the developing permanent teeth.
8. Develop good dental health habits.