

Space Maintainers

Baby teeth are supposed to fall out, but sometimes a child may lose a tooth before their adult teeth are ready to grow in. While it might not seem like a big problem at the moment, it can lead to more problems if not maintained properly. Dentists can place devices called space maintainers in your child's mouth to ensure that their adult teeth will grow in properly.

If your child has lost a tooth prematurely, you should schedule a visit with your child's pediatric dentist. They can examine your child's mouth and tooth structure and then tell you if your child needs a space maintainer.

What is a Space Maintainer in Dentistry?

Dental space maintainers are devices used to leave enough space open for permanent teeth to grow in after baby teeth are lost prematurely. While it might not seem like a big problem at first, not taking care of a gap can lead to expensive problems down the road.

There are many reasons that lead to premature loss of baby teeth including, trauma, congenital defects, accidents, or decay. Depending on your child's situation, your dentist will recommend a different type of space maintainer.

What Are the Different Types of Space Maintainers?

There are two general categories of pediatric space maintainers and within these categories, there are different types of maintainers.

Fixed

In general, a fixed space maintainer is a semi-permanent tooth fixture that keeps enough space open for the adult tooth to grow in. After the permanent tooth has grown in, the maintainer can be removed.

There are four types of fixed space maintainers that a pediatric dentist can use to care for your child's teeth. These different types are crown and loop, distal shoe, lingual, and unilateral.

1. Crown and Loop

These devices include a crown placed over one tooth and a stainless steel wire loop. The loop presses against the tooth on the other side of the gap and keeps the gap open. Once the new tooth grows in properly, the crown can be removed.

2. Distal Shoe

This type of maintainer is only used for permanent first molars that have not grown in yet. The drawback is that these maintainers require more care and attention from your child's dentist.

These maintainers are usually inserted into the gum line after a baby molar falls out prematurely. The device then guides the unerupted adult molar as it grows in. If your

child needs this type of maintainer, you will need to schedule periodic check-ups to make sure the treatment is working properly.

3. Bilateral

These maintainers use wire and crowns or bands to maintain spacing across several tooth gaps.

4. Unilateral

This treatment uses a wire to maintain space between two teeth, similar to a crown and loop treatment. However, unilateral maintainers use a wire that is wrapped around the teeth on either side of the gap.

Removable

A removable space maintainer can be a good option if your child's tooth is almost ready to grow in. These devices are similar to ones used in orthodontic treatments and can be customized for your child's needs.

Usually, these devices are made of acrylic material and can be fitted with a fake tooth. These maintainers also make it easier for your child to keep good oral hygiene habits, such as brushing and flossing.

However, removable devices are usually not as effective at maintaining space as fixed devices.

If you have any questions about which type of maintainer is right for your child, please ask us during your next visit.

Are Space Maintainers Really Necessary?

One important function of a baby tooth is to reserve space for the adult tooth. If a baby tooth falls out prematurely, the empty space may cause adult teeth to become crooked as they grow in.

The body is usually good at maintaining enough space, but every case is different. If your child has lost a tooth prematurely, consult with a pediatric dentist about your child's needs.

CLEANING YOUR SPACE MAINTAINER

Brush gently with a soft toothbrush. Floss underneath all wires and gears using a floss threader at least daily.

Space maintainers are pretty durable but can be damaged or dislodged. Use common sense when eating or chewing things. If you think it could break or bend a wire, don't eat it ... and certainly don't chew on pens or pencils.

FOODS TO AVOID ALL HARD, STICKY OR CHEWY FOODS SUCH AS:

- #1 MOST IMPORTANT-GUM!... This means ALL gum! Including sugar- free!!! It gets stuck in your brackets, around bands and wires. ABSOULETLY NO GUM!!!!

- ICE ... A thousand times NO. It will totally destroy your braces and your teeth.
- PIZZA CRUST, HARD ROLLS, BAGELS ... The hard crust bends wires and knock off brackets
- DORITOS, TACOS, TOSTITOS, CHEETOS, FRITOS, ETC ... Will cut spacers. Will form a hard ball and break/bend your wires.
- CARAMEL CANDY and STICKY FOODS ... Milk duds, laffy taffy, carmel corn, starbursts...Sticky goo will pull off wires and feeds the bacteria in your mouth.
- BEEF JERKY, SLIM JIM.. Tough as nails
- SUCKERS, HARD CANDY ... Loosens bands and knocks off brackets
- NUTS... No nuts of any kind
- RIBS, CHICKEN WINGS, ANY MEAT YOU EAT OFF BONES ... Knocks off brackets.
- PENS AND PENCILS... Favorite exam time snack breaks everything!
- POPCORN... The little shells get between the gums and band and will hurt like crazy.
- RAW FRUITS AND VEGETABLES... Hard as rocks. Will break everything! Biting into foods such as raw carrots, apples or corn-on- the-cob can break off the front brackets. To avoid this, cut these types of foods into bite-size pieces.