

Teeth and Toddlers

by

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"When can I have my teeth?"

It may surprise you to know that a really substantial number of UK children have their baby teeth removed - from quite an early age - because of decay. I don't ever get asked to make dentures for them.

I think it must be - quite understandably - because of all the other features of ED that we (you as families, and we as Paediatric Dentists) try to 'do something' about this one more thing which sets our kids apart from their school chums.

"So - when and what should we do for our little ones?"

There are two areas of difficulty in making dentures for pre-schoolers. Firstly, there is the sheer difficulty of the clinical steps involved in taking the impressions, assessing the bite (the occlusion) trying in the dentures. Secondly, denture wearing is a learned skill - as those of you who have moved to dentures in later life will testify. Mostly, you have to want to learn it!

It's my practice - and that of many of my colleagues - to find a way of building up the primary incisors to make them less 'fang-like' and then base the denture on that.

I have seen a fixed denture which was two orthodontic 'rings' on primary molar teeth with the denture 'slung' on a wire between them. It seemed to work OK but was impossible to clean beneath and would not permit the eruption of replacement teeth beneath it. However, it might be worth considering in very young children if appearance was essential.

And that's the essence of it really - who are we treating, the infant or the adults around them (including me!). I do NOT want to hear of children being ridiculed and so I suppose that I'm more, rather than less, likely to accede to a request to try a denture early. However, there are no hard and fast rules and this decision must be a joint one with dentist and family - and toddler!

"You can't make teeth grow by taking an X-ray"

How many of you have I driven to distraction by telling you this? But it's still true and I feel that five years is probably quite soon enough for a first picture. However, your dentist could very reasonably suggest particular reasons for varying either side of this date.

Toddlers CANNOT have implants. The jaws are too small, the bone remodelling too much and the risk of failure too high. The criterion still seems to be 'when the jaws have stopped growing'. Of course, things may change in the future...

So - for now, the MOST important thing is that any and all teeth which your young'un grows are and remain healthy. Get them registered with a dentist who is going to be actively involved in prevention. Go regularly (3 monthly, four monthly?) in the early years - even if nothing much is happening in the mouth, lots is happening in their head. Dentists call it 'acclimatisation' and it's just that.

Expect to be harassed about snacks and food and drinks in general.

Expect conversations about replacing the Fluoride in the water which should be - but so often isn't - there; and, if necessary, get yourself seen by a consultant or specialist in Paediatric Dentistry. The General Dental Council has a register of such; every dental teaching hospital has at least one.

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