



THE MOUTH, THE TEETH AND THEIR ROLES



What type of teeth do we have?

- 1** The incisors: 4 on top, 4 at the bottom. These are first permanent teeth that come out after milk teeth fall out. They are used to grab and cut food
- 2** The canines: 2 on top, 2 at the bottom. Sharp, they can tear the food. For carnivores, canines are very prominent and also called "fangs"
- 3** Pre-molars: 4 on top and 4 at the bottom, after the canines. They replace the primary molars when they fall out from 9 y.o. onwards. Premolars are square and crush food.
- 4** Molars: the first molars come out at around 6 y.o., the other 4 come out at around 12 y.o. Finally the 4 wisdom teeth come out during adolescence. Molars are large square chewing teeth at the back of the mouth

What are our teeth for?

Teeth's main mission is to grab, cut, tear and crush food. By mixing it with saliva, they prepare food for digestion that continues in the stomach and intestine

Teeth are also used to speak. Teeth enable clear articulation

Teeth play a key role in a beautiful smile and face. When people don't have any teeth, especially (very) old people, the chin becomes more prominent and wrinkles deepen

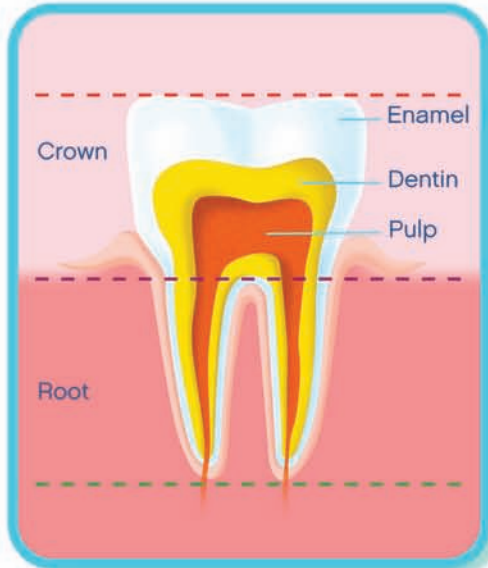


Teeth are alive

The tooth is made up of 2 distinct parts: the crown that is the visible part and the root that sticks the teeth to the jaw

Teeth are composed of three key materials:

- Enamel covers the crown of the tooth. It is a white, very hard mineral substance made primarily from calcium and phosphate. Enamel needs to be extremely hard to withstand the forces you exert in biting and chewing as well as changes in temperature between hot and cold foods or drink. In fact, not only is it the hardest substance in your body, but enamel is one of the hardest naturally occurring substances on earth.
- Dentin makes up the bulk of the tooth and lies just under the enamel. It is a yellowish tissue and is made of similar materials to enamel, although it is not as hard. It is protected by the enamel, and in turn protects the pulp of the tooth (see below). The dentin is sensitive. When tooth decay reaches the dentin, this starts causing pain.
- The Pulp forms the core of the tooth and contains all the nerves and blood supply to nourish the dentin. If tooth decay reaches the pulp of a tooth, it can result in a nasty infection and abscess.



From milk teeth to permanent teeth

Human beings have two dentitions: the primary dentition, i.e. the milk teeth and the permanent dentition (adult teeth) that appears between 6 and 18 years old

Primary Teeth

There are 20 primary teeth, which are much smaller than the 32 adult permanent teeth. These primary teeth are also called 'milk teeth'. The primary dentition is made up of 4 incisors, 2 canines, 4 molars by arch.

The teeth start forming in the womb and first come through into the mouth somewhere between five and eight months of age, although this can vary. The last of these primary teeth normally come through when a child is between two and three years old.

Mixed Dentition

At around 6 years old and up to 12 years old in average, milk teeth start falling out. On each arch, the 4 primary incisors are replaced by the 4 permanent incisors, the 2 primary canines are replaced by the 2 permanent canines and the 4 primary molars are replaced by 4 permanent pre-molars.

At around 6 years old as well, the 4 first permanent molars appear at the back of the mouth. They do not have milk teeth "equivalents".

By the age of thirteen, a child should not have any primary teeth left, and have 28 of the 32 permanent adult teeth in their mouths. The final permanent teeth to erupt are usually the third molars or wisdom teeth (see above) which can come through any time from late teens to early or even mid-twenties, if at all.



20/30 month

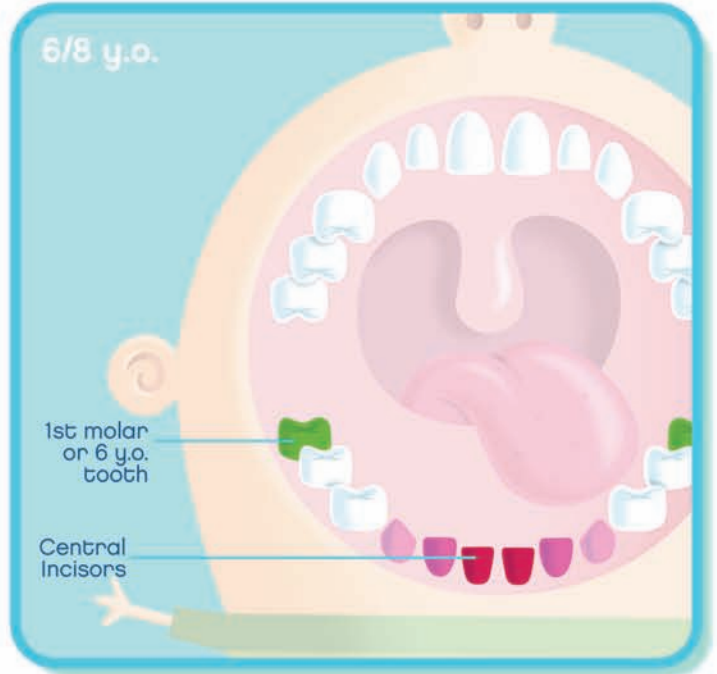
Primary
Dentition



6/8 y.o.

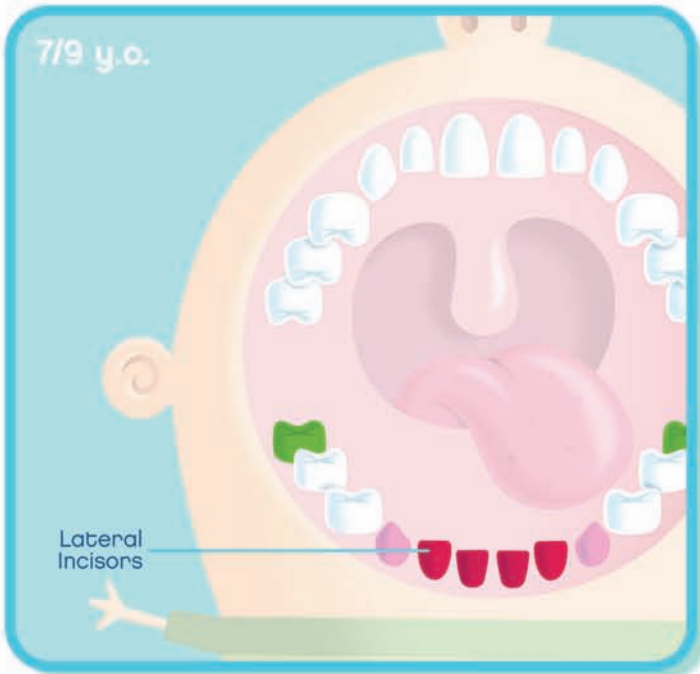
1st molar
or 6 y.o.
tooth

Central
Incisors



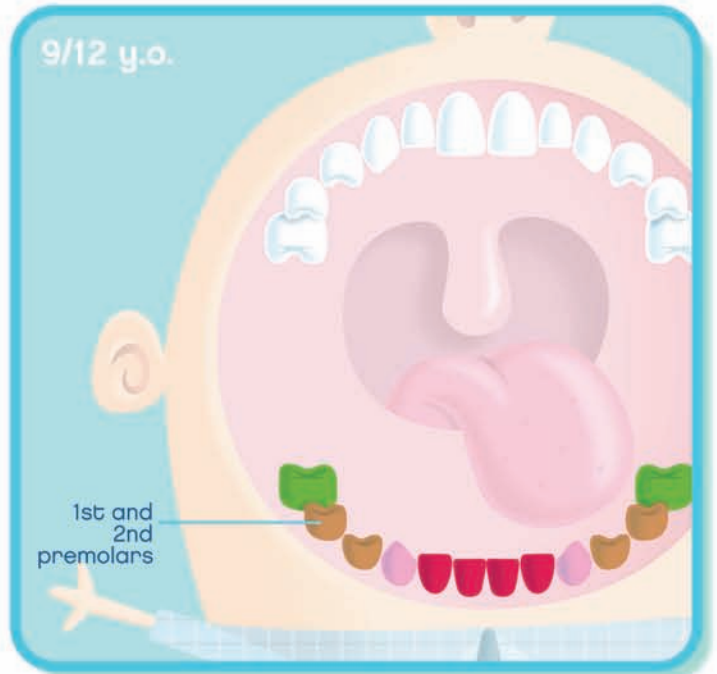
7/9 y.o.

Lateral
Incisors



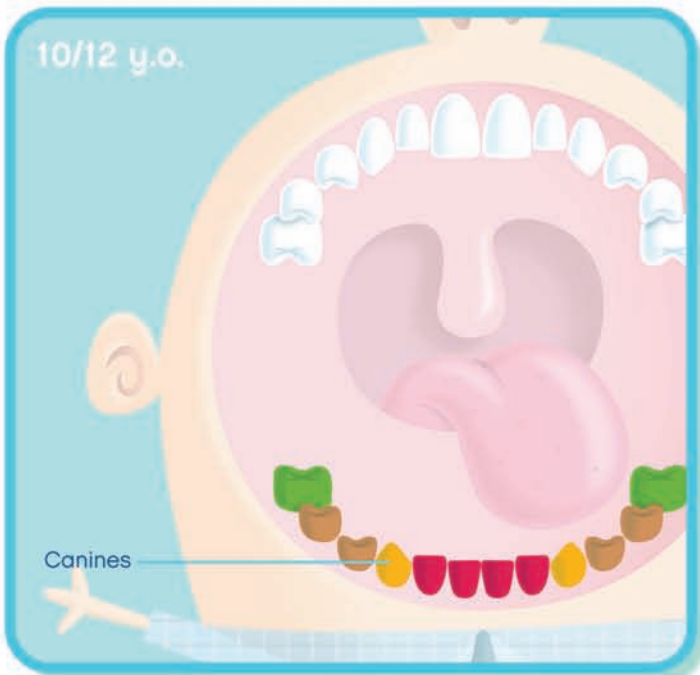
9/12 y.o.

1st and
2nd
premolars



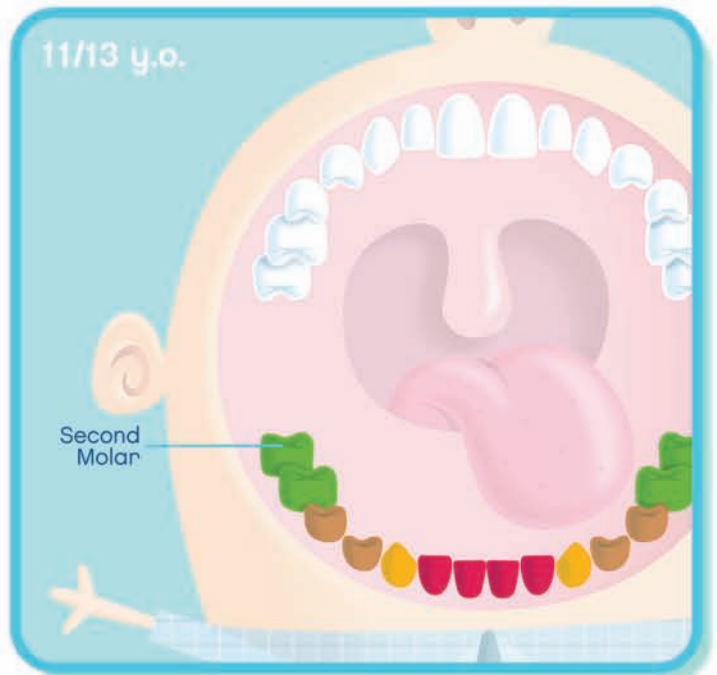
10/12 y.o.

Canines



11/13 y.o.

Second
Molar





Why are primary teeth important?

As primary teeth fall out, it is a common misconception that they do not matter. The primary teeth have a number of important roles to play:

- Primary teeth are essential **in the first step** of digesting food: chewing, biting and grinding.
- Primary teeth act as **guides** for the permanent teeth; by keeping proper spaces in the mouth, they help ensure permanent teeth enter the mouth in the correct places. If primary teeth are lost early through decay there is more chance of permanent teeth entering in the wrong place and becoming crooked or even blocked by other teeth.
- Primary teeth influence the development and growth of the face and jaw muscles.
- Tooth decay and disease present in primary teeth, can be easily passed on to permanent teeth as they erupt. **Primary molars remain in the mouth for around 10 to 12 years with lots of opportunity to pass decay on to their new neighbours.**
- If spread to the root, an infection in a primary tooth can actually damage the permanent tooth lying directly underneath.



Why to watch out for the mixed dentition?

From 6 year old starts the beginning of a mixed dentition with both primary and permanent teeth in the mouth:

- The new permanent teeth are not fully mature. The first few years in the mouth are critical as the teeth are **weaker and more vulnerable to tooth decay**
- **The 6 Year Molar is particularly prone to caries** - it is the first permanent tooth to arrive in the mouth and erupts at the back behind the primary teeth, so it's easy to forget about it.
- The unevenness of the mixed milk and permanent teeth make them also more difficult to clean and protect.

