

Musings on Baby Teeth...

Our little girl just turned eighteen months and has only recently acquired her first few teeth. Go ahead and laugh at the irony, the poor little girl has two dentists for parents and has just recently begun to chew a single row off an ear of corn. Before long, we might have to trick her into an x-ray just to make sure she has some more teeth in there. As of yet though, we're not too concerned because we come from a long line of late teethers. Jennifer, Parker, and I all were late to get our first teeth in. Funny how those genes work.

There are actually a few advantages that we see in cutting teeth a little later in life. The first has to do with breastfeeding. Ask any mother how that goes once sharp little baby teeth start to come in. I don't know from personal experience, but I imagine it isn't too comfortable. Secondly, it seems that kids who get their primary teeth later seem to get fewer cavities. I haven't done the research on this tidbit, but I think it has to do with cavity causing bacteria not having a place (teeth) to live until later on in life. Finally, late blooming baby teeth tend to mean late blooming permanent teeth. This means an older child with correspondingly bigger jaws, to fit all those big, bad permanent teeth into. Bigger jaws allow more room for teeth and, consequently, fewer orthodontic problems.

It is a common and dangerous misconception that kids do not need dental care since they are going to lose their baby teeth anyways. This could not be further from the truth. Healthy primary (baby) teeth can have a huge effect on a child. Kids should start seeing the dentist regularly at twelve months of age to monitor development and build up a history of positive experience. Toothaches happen and they are always much easier to handle when your child knows their dentist and their dental office. A five year old hurting from an abscessed tooth rarely has a good first dental visit. The same goes for that child's parents, their dentist, and anyone else with compassion in the building. Scared kids make my heart hurt.

Primary teeth are most valuable in that they hold space in the jaws so that permanent teeth can grow into the correct positions. A single lost baby molar early in life can lead to multiple growth and development problems. Any primary teeth that are lost prematurely should be evaluated for some type of space maintainer to keep everything else on track.

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Comments can be sent to Drs. Parrish through their website at www.ParrishDental.com.