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space



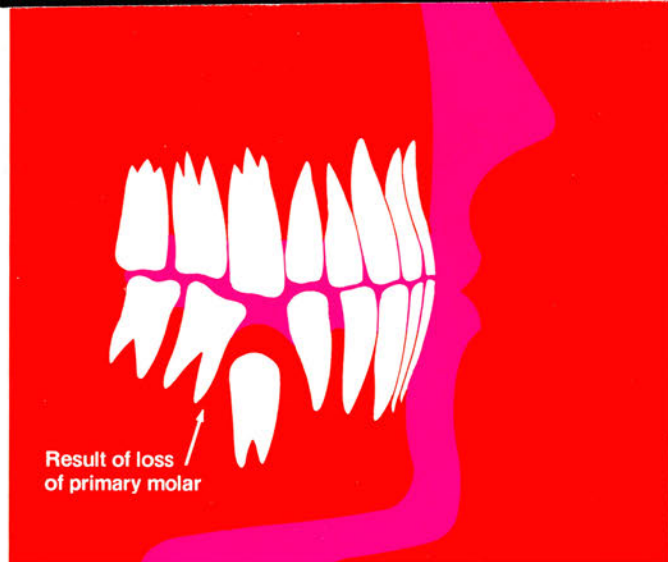
Children need their teeth.

Like adults, they need them for chewing, for speaking, and for appearance. In addition, children need their primary (deciduous) teeth to hold space in their jaws for the permanent teeth. A full set of healthy primary teeth is necessary for the proper development of a child's mouth.

It is unfortunate that the term "baby teeth" is so commonly used. All too often, problems with first teeth are foolishly dismissed with the remark "After all, they're only baby teeth." While it is true that primary teeth are lost eventually, *neglect* of these first teeth can cause serious dental problems later in life.

A primary tooth normally stays in place until the permanent tooth is ready to replace it. If your child's tooth is lost too soon, your dentist may recommend inserting a *space maintainer* to hold the space open until the permanent tooth can erupt in the proper position.

If a space maintainer is not used, your child can have a number of problems. Over a period



of time, the teeth on either side often drift into the empty space. Then, when it is time for the permanent tooth to come in, there is not enough room. The permanent tooth erupts out of its proper position. This is one cause of malocclusion, or "crooked teeth."

If the teeth drift and become crooked, the plaque will be hard to remove. This can result in more tooth decay, and will contribute to periodontal (gum) disease.

A space maintainer is particularly important if your child has lost more than one tooth. It will keep the other teeth in position so that he can chew his food properly. Without a maintainer, your child may chew less efficiently and tend to choose only foods that need little chewing.

Prevention of malocclusion caused by the early loss of a primary tooth is simple. Correction, once malocclusion has developed, may require complicated and more expensive orthodontic treatment.

Remember: At the age of 2 to 2½ (before all of his teeth have erupted), your child should be taken to the dentist. This early visit and regular return check-ups will help your dentist prevent problems before they occur.



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