

Gaps

A diastema is a space or gap between two teeth. It appears most often between the two upper front teeth. However, gaps can occur between any two teeth. Our first experiences with gaps are when our primary dentition or our baby teeth erupt. It is common and desirable for children to have gaps in their teeth. Primary teeth hold the space for our permanent teeth and the more space we have decreases the likelihood for crowded adult teeth.

As our adult teeth start to grow in some children find themselves with a diastema or gap between the two front teeth. Most of the time this is normal and the gap will close when the other adult teeth come into the mouth but sometimes it is caused by a high frenum or muscle attachment. The labial frenum often attaches to the center of the upper lip and between the upper two front teeth. This can cause a large gap when the pull of the muscles keep the teeth from coming together. Another problem which can occur due to having a frenum is the gingival or gum recession which can result when the frenum pulls the gum tissue off of the bone. This can be corrected with a procedure called labial frenectomy which involves removing the labial frenum. Orthodontic patients often have this procedure done to assist with closing a front tooth gap. For older patients who have lost all their teeth, frenums still remain attached to the bone and when they move during talking or eating it can pull the denture down and they too can benefit from having the frenum removed. Sometimes in children the gap is caused by extraneous or supernumerary teeth (extra teeth) which prevent the eruption of the normal set of teeth. These extraneous teeth are quite common. When the extra tooth is in the middle of the arch it is called a mesiodens. They often do not erupt but show up in your child's x-rays and will need to be extracted before the right teeth can erupt normally.

As we enter adulthood we can have diastemas or gaps from malpositioned or crooked teeth. Some diastemas or gaps are small but when they occur in the posterior teeth they allow food to pass between them and it becomes a food trap. When food constantly accumulates between teeth this can lead to decay and periodontal or gum problems. Some diastemas or gaps are caused by having teeth that are too small in relation to the teeth next to them. Some people have small lateral incisors or peg laterals which cause gaps. The gaps can be corrected with orthodontic treatment or crowns. If the gaps are not too big they can also be closed with veneers or even closed with composite or white fillings.

When teeth are extracted or pulled we are left with a big gap. Once a tooth is missing it is imperative to replace the tooth and close the gap. When a tooth is missing teeth next to the space and below the space can drift into the space. This can cause teeth to become misaligned and cause the occlusion or bite to become problematic or "crooked". Spaces created by the drifting teeth can open more gaps between other teeth. Missing teeth or gaps can cause people to become self-conscious about their smile. How missing teeth are replaced depends on the diagnosis, treatment plan, and discussion between you and your dentist following a complete exam. Missing teeth can be replaced with several options. Replacement options include dental implants, fixed bridges, partial dentures, and full dentures.

While gaps are a normal part of our first set of teeth they are not normal in our permanent set of teeth and can have undesirable consequences. If you have gaps which are causing problems physically or if you are unhappy about the appearance of your smile because of the gaps it is important to realize that they do not have to be a permanent part of your appearance. Visit your dentist today to explore the various options available to us today to fix your gaps and give you the smile you deserve. A great smile makes a great, lasting impression, can boost your self-esteem and confidence as well as improve your overall health.

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