
Teeth - gapped teeth

Summary

- Gaps between baby teeth are normal.
 - Gaps between adult front teeth often close by themselves as more adult teeth come through.
 - Talk to your oral health professional or orthodontist about the need for treatment for gapped teeth.
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A diastema is a gap or space between two teeth. There can be gaps between any two teeth, but it is particularly common between the upper front teeth.

Causes of gapped teeth

The most common cause of gapped front teeth is a fraenum that sits lower than usual.

The fraenum inside the upper lip is a fold of skin that attaches the top lip to the upper gum. If you lift up your top lip, you should be able to feel it easily.

If the fraenum is lower than usual it can cause gapped teeth. In these cases, the fraenum is attached so far down on the gum that it keeps the two front teeth apart.

Other causes of gapped front teeth can include:

- natural development – teeth usually have spaces between them when they first come through. The arrival of the canine teeth often closes any gaps
- missing teeth – some children are born missing one or two teeth (either baby or adult) in their jawbones, which leaves a space
- extra teeth – sometimes there are extra teeth in the bone which can prevent other teeth coming through, leaving a gap
- small teeth – some children may have small teeth that allow for gaps
- large jaws – some children's jaws are relatively large compared to the size of their teeth
- lingual fraenum – this is the fraenum that attaches the tongue to the bottom of the mouth. In some cases of severe tongue-tie (a condition caused by a restrictive fraenum that stops the tongue from poking out past the lips), the fraenum may cause a gap in the front teeth of the lower jaw.

Gaps in teeth may close by themselves

Gaps between baby teeth are very normal. In many cases, a gap between the front teeth in the upper jaw closes by itself.

When the baby teeth start to come through (around six to nine months), the front teeth could have a gap and the fraenum may be attached low to the gum. By the time the child turns one, the fraenum may have shortened, and more teeth may have come through and closed any gaps.

Gaps between adult front teeth often close by themselves as more adult teeth come through.

Issues of gapped front teeth

Some issues of gapped front teeth include:

- self-consciousness – some people may feel embarrassed and not want to smile
 - crowded or crooked teeth – a large gap between the front teeth may not leave enough room for the teeth next to the front teeth to come through. This may cause problems with a person's bite.
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Treatment for gapped teeth

An orthodontist is a dentist who has done additional study to specialise in the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of problems in the alignment of teeth and jaws.

Your orthodontist can talk with you about your treatment options. They can advise you whether treatment is needed and if so, what is the most appropriate age to start that work.

Treatment options may include:

- veneers – a veneer is a type of tooth covering. If the gap is small; veneers that are just a little bit wider than the natural teeth could be used to cover the gap. Veneers are permanently stuck to the tooth surface
- removable appliance – such as a plate. This helps to move the teeth closer together
- fixed appliance – such as braces. Braces are fixed to the front teeth and rubber bands and wires are used to pull the teeth together
- fraenectomy – surgery to remove the fraenum that has caused the gap. This is usually done before the gap is closed by orthodontic treatment.

Where to get help

- Your **dentist**
- **Dental Health Services Victoria** provides public dental services through the **Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne** and community dental clinics, for eligible people. For information about public dental services call **(03) 9341 1000** or **1800 833 039** (outside Melbourne metro)
- **Australian Dental Association 'Find a Dentist'** or Tel. **(03) 8825 4600**
- **Orthodontist**

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