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## SPACE MAINTAINERS

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When back baby teeth (molars) are lost prematurely, it is usually necessary to hold the teeth on either side of the space created so it does not close up. If the space is not maintained, it will be lost. When this happens the other baby teeth may shift in order to fill the gap. By the time the permanent tooth for which the gap was meant is finally ready to erupt its place in the mouth has shrunk or been filled. As a result this permanent tooth will create a crooked and/or crowded smile. Crooked and/or crowded teeth in turn can lead to difficulty speaking and trouble chewing. If a canine (eyetooth) is lost early, a space maintaining appliance may also be required. However, the replacement of primary anterior teeth for esthetics, or possibly to facilitate normal speech development, may be indicated.

Dentists can stop this shift ahead of time with the use of a space maintainer. A space maintainer holds open the hole left by a lost tooth by keeping the teeth beside the spot in place. The dentist will remove the space maintainer once the permanent tooth has begun to erupt.

If a tooth is lost on *one side* of the jaw, a unilateral (one-sided) spacer is used. They are usually described as **band-and-loop maintainers** or a **distal shoe appliance**.

If teeth are lost on *both sides* of the upper or lower arch, a bilateral (two-sided) spacer is used. These are described as a **nance holding arch** for the upper teeth or a **lower lingual holding arch (LLHA)** for the lower teeth.

Following the application of a space maintainer the child must visit his or her dentist **every six months** to check the condition of the device, make sure the appliance is still fitting properly, ensure that it is still secure/not loose and to examine the rest of the teeth for future eruption. **If you notice the new tooth erupting improperly under, or going around the space maintainer, see your dentist as soon as possible.**

To avoid the cost and time of replacement, the child should avoid sticky foods such as candy gum or popcorn that might accidentally yank the maintainer out of place. He or she should also ensure that the wires around the empty space are cleaned properly every night. Also, remind your child not to “play” with the new appliance with his or her fingers or tongue.