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## AN INTRODUCTION TO PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY

Pediatric dentistry is the specialized area of dentistry that deals with complete dental care for children from birth through adolescence till late teens, with particular focus on providing oral health care to patients with special needs.

### Anxious and uncooperative children

Dental anxiety is a common problem all over the world, and it prevents many patients from seeking timely dental treatment.

Reasons for anxiety :

- (a) Uncertainty about what is to happen is certainly a factor,
- (b) A poor past experience with a dentist could upset a patient,
- (c) While others may learn anxiety response from parents, relations, or friends.

The way a dentist interacts with patients has a major influence on the success of any clinical or preventive care. A pediatric dentist trained to help anxious and uncooperative children relax, as communicating effectively is of great value to reduce the stress involved when offering clinical care. The training of pediatric dentist includes a thorough understanding of how the dental visit should be structured, and what strategies are available to help children cope with their apprehension about dental procedures.

### First dental visit : (1st Birthday)

There seems to be a lot of confusion amongst parents, pediatricians, and dentists about the correct timing for the first dental visit. Many "family" dentists may tell parents not to bring children to their practice before they have all their primary teeth (age two or three), sometimes they even recommend to wait until age 6. The parent of a fearful or uncooperative child may be told "we have to wait until your child is old enough to sit still". Under unfavorable circumstances delay of dental care can lead to catastrophic disease progression that is not in the best interest of the child.

The AAPD (American Academy of Pediatric Dentist) recommends an initial oral evaluation within six months of the eruption of the first primary tooth and **no later than twelve months of age.**

This means **a child should have his or her first dental visit at the first birthday!**

The oral examination at this early age is usually accomplished with the parent present in the office. It is most often only a visual exam. The child patient may be sitting in the parent's lap with the head in the dentist's lap.

One important aspect of this visit is to discuss the child's risk of developing oral and dental disease. Based on this assessment the dentist will determine the appropriate recall interval for the next dental visit. In high risk cases this may be as early as three months. Dental decay in children can progress very rapidly.

The dentist will also evaluate the child's oral and dental development. The common doubts that can be addressed:

- "How many teeth at what age ?"
- The need for *fluoride supplementation*.
- Discuss non-nutritive habits (finger sucking, pacifier), injury prevention,
- Oral hygiene, and effects of diet on the dentition.

### Follow-up visits : (Till 16years of age)

Following the first visit the child must see the pediatric dentist every 3 to 6months to keep his/her oral health in check through-out his childhood.

This ensures a number of benefits for the child –

*Firstly*, With a bi-annual visit cavities can be detected at an early stage hence preventing invasive treatment protocols like root canals and extractions. These are not only un-pleasurable for the child but also very expensive for the parents. Not to forget the excruciating pain and swelling that the child might encounter in case the cavity goes unattended for a long period of time.

*Secondly*, with routine Fluoride application (every 6 months) one can avoid developing cavities, these go a long way in strengthening your teeth thus making them less prone to cavities.

*Finally*, teeth which would have come out crooked at the adult stage otherwise can be aligned back into perfect form if detected during early childhood, hence avoiding long duration with braces.

Hence, I strongly urge parents not to wait till your child has pain in their teeth, one must schedule a dental visit irrespective of pain, for a general check-up and fluoride application to enhance oral health and avoid any future dental issues.

For concerned parents who have never visited the dental office with their children, I suggest a dental visit at any stage is a beginning towards improved dental health of your child.

It is always better to foresee the problem and trouble-shoot well in advance rather than to wait for the problem to arise. Prevention is most definitely better than cure. In my experience I have seen many of my patients benefit from this approach, as a result of which parents are happy too as they do not need to shell out costs for root canals etc. On that note I will close by saying:

***Dental care is not expensive, but ignorance is !***



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**“An Ounce of Prevention is worth a pound of cure.”**

# HOW TO HANDLE MISALIGNMENT OF TEETH IN CHILDREN

Some of the procedures that are carried out in preventive orthodontics can also be carried out in interceptive orthodontics but the timings are different.

## Interceptive Orthodontics

It is a procedure undertaken when the problem has already occurred or is developing. Thus interceptive orthodontics basically refers to measures taken to prevent a potential problem from progressing into a more severe one.

Procedures undertaken in interceptive orthodontics are correction of developing tooth relationship problems, control of abnormal habits such as thumb sucking, tongue thrusting, mouth breathing, and removal of soft tissue or any bony hindrance to enable eruption of teeth.

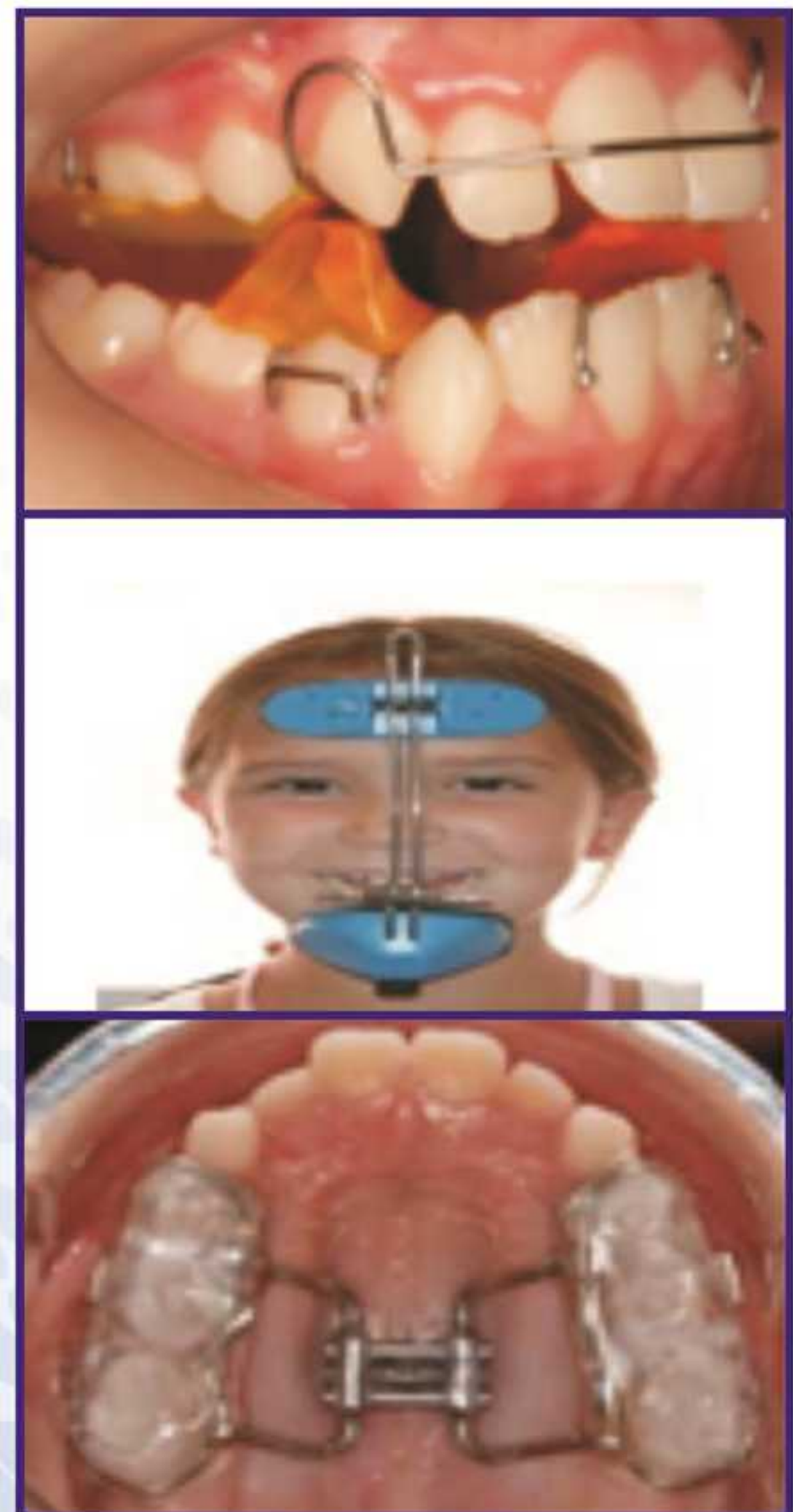
Muscle exercises are also considered under interceptive treatment. This can help patients who have a short upper lip to achieve a better lip seal as well as control the movement of the tongue that may lead to an open bite in the future.

## Preventive Orthodontics

These procedures are done to prevent a problem before it occurs.

It involves educating the parent and the patient, paying close attention to the growth and development of the face and jaws. It would also involve the diagnosis that would predict the appearance of the problematic face and the treatment procedures required to prevent the onset of the problem. Preventive orthodontics includes studying the eruption of teeth before and after birth, and any developing problems and space maintenance for early shedding of the primary (milk) teeth.

It includes the use of appliances such as space maintainers as well as extraction of baby teeth that cause ulcerations on the tongue or feeding problems, extraction of over-retained primary teeth, and planned serial extractions,



**Prevention is better than cure, a saying that should be followed.**



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