

# HKU Faculty of Dentistry recommends best time to remove hidden extra teeth

In some children, extra teeth that remain buried inside the jaws can cause problems for the main teeth. According to a report from researchers at the HKU Faculty of Dentistry, the earlier that dentists remove hidden extra teeth from the upper-front part of the mouth, the better it is for the development of nearby adult teeth.

Extra (or supernumerary) teeth that remain unerupted and stay hidden within children's jaws may interfere with the development of adult (or permanent) teeth – for example, by causing root and bone problems, delayed emergence through the gum, and poor alignment. However, it has been unclear when these hidden extra teeth should be surgically removed. Now, Dr Rashied Omer, Dr Robert Anthonappa, and [Professor Nigel King](#) at the HKU Faculty of Dentistry have discovered that the best time to extract hidden extra teeth from the upper-front jaw is before the age of 6 to 7 years; extraction after this age raises the likelihood of complications in the adjacent adult teeth.

The finding came from a study of 126 southern Chinese children aged 3 to 15 years who attended the Paediatric Dentistry Clinic at HKU's dental teaching hospital between 1980 and 2003. Three quarters of the children were boys and one quarter were girls; their average age was 7.7 years. A total of 165 unerupted extra upper-front teeth were discovered during visual or X-ray examinations, and the average age at which they were surgically removed was 8.3 years.

Thorough clinical examinations allowed the researchers to assess if the children's hidden extra teeth caused problems for the 170 upper-front adult teeth (upper central incisors) and if the problems were related to the age at which the hidden teeth were removed.

The most common developmental problem observed in the upper-front adult teeth was loss of root tissue (root resorption). Surgical removal of the hidden extra teeth at the age of 4 to 5 years resulted in the fewest complications in adult-tooth development. More problems occurred if extra teeth were removed at ages between 7 and 9 years, and waiting until 10 years of age led to the most complications. All of the 170 upper-front adult teeth, however, were alive when fully formed.

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Noting that the usual age when adult upper-front teeth emerge from the gum is between 6 and 8 years of age in southern Chinese children, the researchers recommend that hidden extra teeth in the upper-front jaw should be extracted before this point to prevent developmental problems. Surgical removal “seems to be advantageous up to approximately 6- to 7-years-old after which time further complications are expected,” they conclude.

The research was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Pediatric Dentistry*.

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**Source:** Omer RSM, Anthonappa RP, King NM. Determination of the optimum time for surgical removal of unerupted anterior supernumerary teeth. *Pediatric Dentistry* 2010;32:14-20.

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