SYMPTOM

Widely spaced teeth

Widely spaced teeth are teeth with noticeable gaps between them.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Visible gaps that may catch food or affect speech

WHERE IT IS FELT
Between teeth, often the upper front teeth

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Normal growth, tooth-jaw size mismatch, missing teeth

WHEN IT IS URGENT
A suddenly loose or displaced tooth after an injury

USUALLY LASTS
Until growth, dental treatment, or the underlying cause changes

SEE A DOCTOR IF
New gaps, loose teeth, pain, or bleeding gums

Overview

Widely spaced teeth have noticeable gaps between two or more teeth. The medical term for a gap between teeth is a diastema . Gaps often appear between the upper front teeth, but they can occur anywhere in the mouth.

Spacing is an appearance or symptom, not a disease by itself. Some people naturally have gaps because of the size and shape of their teeth and jaw. Gaps are also common while children's adult teeth are coming through.

A gap may need assessment if it appears suddenly, becomes wider, or occurs with loose teeth, gum bleeding, pain, or swelling. These changes can sometimes point to a dental or gum problem.

What it may feel or look like

Widely spaced teeth often cause no discomfort. You may simply notice a visible space when smiling or brushing your teeth.

Depending on the gap's position and size, you may also notice:

A gap that has always been present is different from new spacing that develops in adulthood. The timing and speed of the change can help a dentist work out the likely cause.

- Food becoming trapped between teeth
- Air escaping during certain speech sounds
- Gums becoming sore where food collects
- A change in how your teeth meet when biting
- One or more teeth moving or becoming loose

Common causes

Normal growth in children is a frequent reason for spacing. Gaps between baby teeth can leave room for the larger adult teeth. A gap between the upper front adult teeth may also become smaller as other teeth, especially the canine teeth, emerge.

Tooth and jaw size can create permanent gaps. For example, small teeth in a relatively broad jaw may not fill all the available space. This pattern can run in families.

Small or missing teeth may leave extra room. Some people are born without certain adult teeth, while others have teeth that are narrower than usual.

A prominent lip attachment can contribute to a front-tooth gap. The labial frenulum is the band of tissue connecting the inside of the upper lip to the gum. If it is thick or attaches low on the gum, it may be associated with spacing.

Repeated pressure on the teeth may affect their position. Long-term thumb or finger sucking, tongue pressure against the front teeth, or some swallowing patterns can contribute. More than one factor is often involved.

Less common causes include teeth shifting after another tooth is lost, movement after orthodontic treatment, or an unerupted or extra tooth affecting nearby teeth.

Advanced gum disease, called periodontitis , can damage the bone and tissues supporting the teeth. Teeth may then loosen, spread apart, or change position. New or increasing gaps with bleeding gums or loose teeth should be assessed.

An injury can suddenly move a tooth and create a new space. This needs prompt dental care, especially if a tooth is loose, displaced, broken, or knocked out.

When to seek medical care

Arrange a routine dental appointment if a gap is new, getting wider, trapping food, affecting speech or biting, or bothering you. You should also book an appointment if your gums bleed regularly or appear to be receding.

Seek urgent, same-day dental care if:

Go to emergency care now if swelling of the mouth, face, or neck makes it difficult to breathe or swallow, or if there is heavy bleeding that will not stop.

Spacing without pain, injury, looseness, or swelling is not usually an emergency.

- A tooth becomes loose or moves after an injury
- You have severe dental pain, swelling, fever, or pus
- A tooth is knocked out or pushed out of position
- New spacing develops quickly with noticeably loose teeth

How the cause is found

A dentist will ask when you first noticed the gap and whether it has changed. They may ask about previous dental treatment, missing teeth, injuries, childhood sucking habits, and any family pattern of spacing.

The examination may include checking:

Dental X-rays may be recommended to look for unerupted, missing, or extra teeth. They can also show the amount of bone supporting the teeth. Not everyone with a gap needs an X-ray.

- The number, size, and shape of your teeth
- How your upper and lower teeth meet
- Whether any teeth are loose
- The health of your gums and supporting tissues
- The position of the lip attachment
- Whether teeth are still developing or emerging

Treatment and self-care

Healthy spacing does not always need treatment. You may choose to leave a natural gap if it does not affect cleaning, speech, or biting.

When treatment is wanted or medically useful, the options depend on the cause:

Children's gaps are often monitored while the adult teeth develop. Treating a front gap too early may be unnecessary if it is likely to narrow naturally.

Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste and clean between the teeth. Floss or an appropriately sized interdental brush can help where food collects. A dentist or dental hygienist can show you which method suits the space.

Do not put elastic bands or other objects around teeth to close a gap. Unsupervised pressure can injure the gums, damage supporting bone, or cause tooth loss.

- Braces or clear aligners can move teeth and close spaces
- Dental bonding can add tooth-coloured material to narrow a gap
- Veneers or crowns may change tooth shape in selected cases
- Replacement teeth may fill spaces caused by missing teeth
- Gum treatment may be needed before moving teeth affected by periodontitis
- Frenulum treatment is sometimes considered as part of a planned dental or orthodontic approach

What to expect

Some childhood gaps narrow as the jaw and adult teeth develop. Natural gaps in adults generally remain unless the teeth are moved or reshaped.

Orthodontic treatment can close many spaces, but teeth may move again afterward. Retainers are often used to help maintain the new position. Cosmetic treatments may need maintenance or replacement over time.

If gum disease, missing teeth, or another dental problem caused the spacing, treating that cause is important before or alongside closing the gap.

Common questions

Are gaps between children's teeth normal?

Often, yes. Spacing between baby teeth can provide room for adult teeth. A dentist can check gaps that are very uneven, linked to a missing tooth, or still present after nearby adult teeth have emerged.

Can gum disease cause teeth to spread apart?

Advanced gum disease can weaken the tissues and bone supporting teeth. This may cause

looseness, movement, and new gaps. Bleeding gums, receding gums, or shifting teeth deserve a dental assessment.

Can a gap close on its own?

Some gaps in children narrow as other adult teeth emerge. Established gaps in adults are less likely to close without treatment.

Does a prominent lip attachment always need surgery?

No. Its appearance alone does not show that treatment is needed. A dentist or orthodontist will consider tooth development, gap size, gum health, and any planned orthodontic treatment.

Can braces close widely spaced teeth?

Braces and clear aligners can often close gaps. The best approach depends on why the spacing developed and whether teeth or gum support are missing.

Sources

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- Cleveland Clinic: Diastema