

Premature Children Have Smaller Teeth, Research Suggests

ScienceDaily (Oct. 27, 2011) — The size of teeth in premature children is smaller than that of children who were full-term, according to a study by the Faculty of Odontology at Malmö University in Sweden.

Our knowledge about premature children, and their physical and mental development as they grow up, is constantly growing. In recent years several studies of children's dental health have been published by researchers at the Faculty of Odontology in Malmö. Liselotte Paulsson-Björnsson, a specialist in orthodontics, has studied 80 children born before week 33 of pregnancy.

"We have examined how their teeth are developing and, among other things, we've looked at their bites. We've also checked their need for orthodontic adjustments and found that it is greater than in the control group, children born at full term," she says.

The children participating in the various studies were born in the mid 1990s and were examined when they developed their first permanent teeth at the age of eight to ten. The first permanent teeth are the front teeth in the upper and lower jaw and the so-called six-year molars, the first big molars.

The results show that the teeth of premature children were up to ten percent smaller compared with the control group. The earlier the children were born the smaller their teeth were.

"When we examined the children we also saw that their teeth were farther apart," says Liselotte Paulsson-Björnsson, who stresses that having small teeth as such is not a serious problem, but it can be aesthetically problematic to have large gaps between your teeth.

"But these problems can be addressed. We can move teeth if the gaps between them are too large, and there is also good material to extend teeth if they're too small."

Disturbances in the teeth's mineralization phase can also lead to spots on the front teeth, but this is also a problem that can be dealt with using cosmetic dental treatments.

Liselotte Paulsson-Björnsson is now planning new studies to follow these children into their teens. Among other things, she will be studying whether all permanent teeth are affected in terms of size, or only the ones that are formed in connection with birth. She also wants to study the children's quality of life in relation to their dental status.

"But as care of premature children is under constant development, it's not possible to automatically transfer my findings to children being born prematurely now," she says.

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