Nova's Dental Discovery: Understanding Human Teeth

Learning objective: To identify and describe the functions of the different types of human teeth and understand their role in the digestive system.

Read the front of each flashcard to test your knowledge about the human mouth. Nova the owl suggests using these to quiz a partner and check if you can identify which teeth do the hard work of crunching and which are for tearing.

Incisors

These are the sharp, chisel-shaped front teeth used for cutting and biting into food.

Canines

These are pointed, sharp teeth located next to the incisors, designed for tearing food.

Premolars

These teeth have a flatter surface and are used for crushing and grinding food into smaller pieces.

Molars

The large teeth at the back of the mouth used for heavy-duty grinding and chewing food before swallowing.

Enamel

The hard, protective outer layer that covers the crown of the tooth, which is the hardest substance in the human body.

Dentine

The layer underneath the enamel that makes up the bulk of the tooth structure.

Pulp

The soft centre of the tooth containing blood vessels and nerves.

What is the primary role of teeth in digestion?

Teeth perform mechanical digestion by breaking down food into smaller pieces so it is easier to swallow and digest.

Why do humans have different shaped teeth?

Because we are omnivores, we need different shapes to bite, tear, and grind a variety of different food types.

What is the main difference between molars and incisors?

Incisors are designed for biting and cutting, whereas molars are wider and designed for grinding and crushing.

How many sets of teeth do humans usually grow in a lifetime?

Two sets: the primary (baby) teeth and the secondary (permanent/adult) teeth.