

Neanderthal teeth similar to modern teeth

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Columbus, Ohio, researchers say they've determined Neanderthal tooth development was similar to that of modern humans. The Ohio State University researchers said their findings suggest the maturation period of the two hominid groups might be similar.

Humans have a prolonged period of infant and childhood growth, which is a unique feature among modern primates.

Since tooth development correlates with other aspects of primate growth and development, scientists say dental studies of ancestral hominids might provide insight as to when the feature of prolonged childhood emerged.

Debbie Guatelli-Steinberg and colleagues compared the dental growth rate of Neanderthals with three diverse modern human groups -- Inuit, English and southern African.

The researchers found the overall rate of formation of Neanderthal teeth was well within the range of variation occurring in modern human populations. These results do not indicate Neanderthals reached adulthood any quicker than do modern humans.

"Neanderthals also had large brains, so it makes sense that they took a long time to grow up, just as modern humans do," said Guatelli-Steinberg.

The research appears in this week's early online edition of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

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