



## **Orthodontics FAQ**

### **What is orthodontics?**

Orthodontics is the branch of dentistry that specializes in the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of dental and facial irregularities. Braces are appliances or devices used to make these corrections.

### **What is an orthodontist?**

An Orthodontist is a highly trained specialist who has completed two to three years of training after graduating from dental school. An orthodontist not only straightens teeth but also is interested in the bite, facial profile, and oral health.

### **Why should you choose an orthodontic specialist?**

Teeth and sometimes faces are permanently changed by orthodontic treatment; therefore, it is very important that the treatment be done properly. A licensed orthodontic specialist is an expert at moving teeth, helping jaws develop properly and working with you to help make sure the teeth stay in their new positions. Some advanced techniques such as Lingual 'invisible braces' are only available through a specialist.

### **What causes crooked teeth?**

Just as we inherit eye colour from our parents, mouth and jaw features are also inherited. Local factors such as finger sucking, high cavity rate, gum disease, trauma and premature loss of baby teeth can also contribute to a bad bite.

### **Why should I have my teeth straightened?**

Orthodontic treatment improves your smile and your health. Your smile is the most striking part of your face. Look in the mirror. Do you like your smile now? Can your smile be improved? Think about how you react to someone with a pretty smile. Do you find them more attractive? Will you be more attractive with an appealing smile? Orthodontic treatment will make your smile look fabulous. The fabulous smile can last for the rest of your life. Think about how a fabulous smile will improve your life.

Your health can be also affected by poorly arranged teeth, they are harder to clean and can trap food particles which in turn may cause tooth decay and gum disease.

Crooked teeth may also wear in ways that they should not, putting extra stress on your teeth, gums and jaw which can lead to problems later on.

### **How do braces straighten crooked teeth?**

Braces use steady, gentle pressure over time to move teeth into their proper positions. They don't look like they're doing much just sitting there. But in fact, every moment of your orthodontic treatment, there's something happening in your mouth. Something good for you. The brackets we place on your teeth and the main wire that connects them, are the two main components. The bracket is a piece of specially shaped metal or ceramic that we affix to each tooth. Then we bend the arch wire to reflect your "ideal" bite - what we want you to look like after treatment. The wire threads through the brackets and, as the wire tries to return to its original shape, it applies pressure to actually move your teeth. Picture your tooth resting in your jaw bone. With pressure on one side from the arch wire, the bone on the other side gives way. The tooth moves. New bone grows in behind. It may look like nothing is happening--but we're making a new smile here. Thanks to new materials and procedures, all this happens much quicker than ever before. It's kind of an engineering feat.

### **Can you be too old for braces?**

No. If the bone and gum tissue around the teeth are healthy, age is not a factor. About 20% of orthodontic patients are adults and this percentage is growing fast.

Will additional jaw growth allow self correction of crowded teeth visible in a 8 year old?

No. The space available for the front teeth does not increase after the permanent 6 year molars erupt. In most people, the space available for the front teeth decreases with increasing age.

### **If I wait, isn't there a chance that my child's bite will get better on its' own?**

Usually it is just the opposite, if you wait orthodontic problems will almost always get worse. If a few teeth are crooked or crowded, the orthodontist can realign the crowded teeth easily. However, if you do not treat the crowding right away, the crooked teeth will encroach onto your child's other teeth and push the other teeth out of alignment too. As a result if you wait, your child's orthodontic problems will usually get worse.

If you avoid needed treatment when your children are teens, the children will usually need more uncomfortable treatment later in life. Isn't it better to take care of the problem when it is first discovered rather than waiting until the problem gets worse?

### **Is treatment more difficult for adults?**

Adults can be treated successfully at any time. However, treatment options using growth are no longer available.

### **Can I get colours on my braces?**

Colours have gone over very big with countless braces wearers. With colours, patients decide to become involved in their treatment and usually take better care of their braces. Patients won't take time to choose special colours unless they intend to use them and speed their treatment. There are soft pastels that coordinate with wardrobe to bright hues for celebrating holidays or expressing team spirit. These colours can be changed when the wires are changed to add constant variety. Once the braces are off, retainer colour choices are only limited by your imagination.

If I don't want to show colours on my braces, what can I do to play down braces?

Give clear tooth coloured braces a try or if you use makeup, use it to draw attention away from your mouth. Go wild using eye shadow and keep the lips simple with beige or nothing at all. Stay away from lip gloss that makes the metal parts of braces more reflective.

### **How long do you have to wear braces?**

That depends a lot on you and how bad your bite is to begin with. The better you are about wearing and taking care of your braces, the sooner your teeth will improve.

### **Will any teeth be extracted?**

Only if there's not enough room for all your teeth. Don't worry, if you have teeth removed, the spaces will be closed.

### **Do braces hurt?**

Braces have changed a lot in the last 20 years so they are a lot less uncomfortable than they were 20 years ago. At present, we do not know how to avoid the discomfort when the braces are first put in, or when the braces are being tightened. However, modern, cast, low profile brackets are designed to minimize your children's discomfort between visits to the orthodontist. Most children experience some soreness during their first week in braces and occasional discomfort when their braces are being tightened. However, after the first week, most children hardly notice the braces at all.

### **Should you do anything special during their first week in braces?**

We generally recommend that patients be especially careful about what they eat during the first week after getting braces. Usually, patients are advised to only eat softer foods and to be very careful with their mouth.

### **Are there foods that should be avoided?**

We generally recommend that you avoid hard sticky, gooey or crunchy foods. Caramel can stick on to your braces. Crunchy foods like carrots and apples and hard rolls can occasionally knock off a bracket.

### **Are there any activities that should be avoided when I have braces?**

We advise against patients participating in activities where there will be many blows to a patient's mouth. Sports like boxing and wrestling should be avoided. You should wear an orthodontic mouth guard whenever they participate in any sporting activity.

### **What happens if a bracket comes off?**

The orthodontist will attach another bracket. However, every time the orthodontist has to replace a bracket, it delays the orthodontic treatment.

### **What happens if my I swallows a bracket?**

It is usually NOT a serious problem if you swallow a bracket. Bracket are usually made of a medical grade stainless steel which should not have any adverse effects on you if the bracket is swallowed. The bracket just passes through your digestive system.

Inhaling a bracket is a different matter however. If you inhale a bracket, and the bracket gets into your lungs, it could cause a problem. Therefore, the orthodontist will normally refer you to your local hospital for an x-ray.

### **How often should I brush my teeth when I have braces?**

We recommend that you continue to brush and floss your teeth after every meal and before you go to bed. Brushing and flossing is especially important when you have braces because food can get caught in the braces and cause cavities. Many orthodontists also recommend that you brush with a fluoride gel in a further attempt to avoid cavities.

### **What does a retainer do?**

The objective of a retainer is to keep your teeth in perfect alignment after braces are removed.

### **Why is a retainer needed? Do teeth move after orthodontic treatment?**

Usually, when braces are first removed, your teeth will all be in perfect alignment, but your gums, bones, etc. will not have completely shifted into their new positions. The retainer holds your teeth in position until your gums, bones etc. settle in to their new positions..

### **What happens if I do not use the retainer?**

If you do not wear a retainer, your gums and bones will not fully settle into their new positions. Eventually, the incorrectly shaped bones will push your teeth causing the teeth to move out of perfect alignment.

### **How long should my child use a retainer?**

Generally, patients are advised to keep wearing a retainer 24 hours a day for the first week, removing them only for: cleaning, eating and contact sports. Then it is recommended that you continue to wear a retainer every night until you stop growing at about age 24, then a few nights a week to maintain their position.