

# How to...



# choose an ORTHODONTIST

## Children

Most people think that an orthodontist should see a child when all of their permanent teeth have come in. However, the American Association of Orthodontists recommends that children should have an orthodontic screening no later than age seven. Orthodontics is a branch of dentistry that specializes in the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of dental and facial irregularities. By age 7, enough permanent teeth have erupted and enough jaw growth has occurred that the orthodontist can identify current problems, anticipate future problems and alleviate parents' concerns if all is normal. Some signs or habits that may indicate the need for an early orthodontic evaluation are:

- Early or late loss of baby teeth
- Mouth breathing
- Thumb sucking
- Crowded teeth
- Teeth that meet abnormally or not at all
- Jaws and teeth that are out of proportion to the rest of the face

There are a few bite problems that that may be treated in two phases – a first phase when a child has some adult and baby teeth and a second phase when most adult teeth have erupted. However, the majority of bite problems are treated with one treatment typically in adolescence.

Many orthodontists have a pre-orthodontic guidance program, which allows the orthodontist to monitor the child's dentition. In this program there may not be appliances or braces placed; however, the orthodontist is able to monitor the child's transition of baby teeth to adult teeth and follow the pattern of a child's jaw growth. At these visits the orthodontist is able to recommend any treatment if needed or discuss what the future might behold.

Although early evaluation is great, it is never too late to seek an opinion about orthodontic treatment. Orthodontic treatment is becoming more popular due to the variety of options a patient has to straighten their teeth.

## Adults

Once upon a time, braces were mainly the province of preteens and teens, with the silver wire-coated teeth leading to embarrassing nicknames such as “tinsel teeth” or “metal mouth.” But these days, more adults are choosing to have their crooked teeth corrected by braces. Even better, there are alternatives to those silver metal braces that adults might remember from their own teen years.

## Braces Available

Today there are many types of braces available. There are traditional metal braces that are silver or gold; there are clear ceramic braces and Invisalign® “braces”. Invisalign® braces are clear plastic trays that are customized to fit each patient's mouth. Each aligner has incremental tooth movement built in.

## Traditional Braces

These are what most people think of when they think of braces. Silver or gold brackets bonded to the teeth with wires attached. There are colored “ties” that attach the wire to the bracket that add fun and function to the treatment.

## Ceramic Braces

These are the “clear braces” that people hear so much about. The advantage to them is that they are clear and less noticeable. They are as effective as the traditional braces and are a nice option for people that are concerned about the look of traditional braces.

## Invisalign® Braces

These snap on plastic trays are customized to fit the patient's mouth. They are virtually invisible, removable and comfortable. Patients wear them at all times except to remove them to eat, drink, brush and floss. Aligners are changed approximately every two weeks to help the teeth move into a new position. Although Invisalign® is not for all corrections it may be a great option for someone contemplating orthodontic treatment.

No matter what type of braces you choose, there are some things they have in common. For one thing, the length of time a person wears braces depends on the amount of correction needed. This can range anywhere from a few months to a few years. Some of the most typical adolescent treatments take about two years. Secondly, it is important to know that teeth can shift after the braces are removed. Most orthodontists recommend wearing a retainer to keep the teeth from shifting back to their original position. The type of retainer and wear schedule varies according to the patient's original bite problem.

Whether your particular problem is an overbite, an under bite or simply crooked teeth, you can be sure there are braces out there to correct the problem.

No matter which option you and your orthodontist agree is best, you need to be seen by your orthodontist on a regular basis. You also need to visit your regular dentist for exams and cleanings throughout your orthodontic work.

Orthodontics is an investment on a fantastic smile from age 7 – 70!

