

Questions and Answers

What causes orthodontic problems?

Most orthodontic problems (malocclusions) are inherited. Examples of these genetic problems are crowding, spacing, protrusion, extra or missing teeth, and some jaw growth problems. Other malocclusions are acquired as a result of thumb- or finger-sucking, dental disease, accidents, the early or late loss of baby (primary) teeth, or other causes.

Why is treatment so important?

Orthodontic treatment creates a better bite, making teeth fit better, and decreases the risk of future, and potentially costly dental problems. Crooked and crowded teeth are hard to clean and maintain. A malocclusion can cause tooth enamel to wear abnormally, difficulty in chewing and/or speaking, and excess stress on supporting bone and gum tissue. Without treatment, many problems simply become worse.

Why select an orthodontist?

Orthodontists are dental specialists who diagnose, prevent and treat dental and facial irregularities. They receive an additional two to three years of specialized education beyond dental school to learn the proper way to align and straighten teeth. Only those who successfully complete this formal education may call themselves “orthodontists,” and only orthodontists may be members of the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO).



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When should children get a check-up with an orthodontist?

The AAO recommends that your child get a check-up with an orthodontist at the first recognition of an orthodontic problem, but no later than age 7. By then, your child has enough permanent teeth for an orthodontist to determine whether an orthodontic problem exists or is developing. Putting off a check-up with an orthodontist until a child has lost all baby teeth could be a disservice. Some orthodontic problems may be easier to correct if they are found early. A check-up no later than age 7 gives your orthodontist the opportunity to recommend the appropriate treatment at the appropriate time. If early treatment is in order, the orthodontist may be able to achieve results that may not be possible once the face and jaws have finished growing.

Can adults benefit from orthodontic treatment?

Yes. Age is not a consideration when it comes to orthodontic treatment. Healthy teeth can be moved at any age. Today, adults account for one in every five orthodontic patients. Thanks to the variety of “appliances” used by orthodontists, adults may be able to inconspicuously achieve the great smile they want. Advances in today’s orthodontic materials mean patients see the orthodontist only about once every six weeks during active treatment.

What is my role in treatment?

Orthodontic treatment is a partnership between the patient and the orthodontist. The orthodontist provides custom-made fixed or removable appliances that use gentle pressure over time to move teeth into their proper positions. Your job is to follow the orthodontist’s instructions, keep scheduled orthodontic appointments and maintain excellent oral hygiene so you achieve your best results. You will also need to see your primary care dentist as recommended.

How long does treatment take?

Orthodontic treatment averages less than two years, but can range from one to three years. When “active” treatment ends, retainers are prescribed for most patients to keep teeth in their new positions.

How much does treatment cost?

The cost of orthodontic treatment depends on many factors, including the severity of the problem, its complexity and length of treatment. Your orthodontist will be glad to discuss fees with you before treatment begins.

Many patients find that orthodontic treatment is more affordable today than ever. Most orthodontists offer a variety of payment plans. Employers may offer dental insurance plans with orthodontic benefits, and/or the option to set aside pre-tax dollars in a flexible spending account or other health savings account.