

DOES YOUR CHILD NEED BRACES?



IVANOV
ORTHODONTIC
EXPERTS

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Why Is Your Child's Smile So Important?

Naturally parents have one of the hardest tasks—to juggle various activities during the day and to find appropriate time for their family and children. Obviously, when it comes to raising children, most parents, especially smart parents, want the best for their children without a doubt. It is during our children's early years that we need to think what we want for them, where we want them to be in the future, what relationships they are going to have, what their profession will be, and what their family future is going to look like, and those are just a few curious thoughts that parents have.

Is my child not too young for braces at the age of seven?

This is a valid question, and nine out of ten times, the answer is yes. For most children an orthodontic exam at the age of seven will just be an exam, and the only purpose will be monitoring the growth and development until your child is ready for braces. That being said, early treatment at the appropriate age can prevent potential:

- Serious problems with teeth or jaw alignment such as crossbites
- Excessive teeth wear and teeth chips or fractures
- Periodontal gum problems such as recessions
- Growth of teeth that do not have enough space or will not have enough space to come out
- Difficulty cleaning teeth
- Insufficient confidence and awkward social interactions



Some problems are best corrected at an early age. Correction at the appropriate time will save you time and money and help prevent problems that become more difficult and costly to fix as time goes by. The orthodontist will be there to point out trouble spots, but ultimately it is your decision, your child's future, and your finances.

At what age do I need to check my child's teeth?

This is one of the questions that parents ask me most frequently after they bring their children for an orthodontic examination. Did I bring my child too early? Did I bring my child too late? Few parents are very proactive and bring their children before or at the age of five or six; at that age, we only have baby teeth, and the definitive position of the permanent teeth is a guess at best. Few parents have a sufficiently knowledgeable dentist to recommend the first orthodontic evaluation at the time when the child is starting second grade. I'd recommend parents have their child's first orthodontic exam at age of seven because at that time the front permanent top and bottom teeth are developing, and they lay the framework for the top and bottom jaws. An orthodontist can rule out potential problems at that age. The American Association of Orthodontists also recommends the first orthodontic exam be arranged at age seven. About nine out of ten children will not need any treatment, and they will be placed on a follow-up watch or evaluation appointment to monitor growth and teeth development.

What Signs Should I Look for in My Child's Teeth?

The crucial signs that you should look for are as follows:

- Crooked, misplaced, two rows of teeth
- Severely gapped teeth
- Teeth that stick out forward
- Early loss or asymmetric loss of teeth
- Overretained baby teeth
- Teeth grinding or teeth clenching
- Teeth that bite into roof of the mouth
- Thumb, finger, lip, or mouth-breathing habits
- Teeth that do not meet normally
- Teeth that do not meet at all
- Speech difficulty
- Chewing difficulty
- Jaws that are too forward, backward, or to the side
- Facial imbalance



How do I find the right orthodontist?

People have two options for their orthodontic treatment. The first is to go to an orthodontist who specializes in straightening teeth, and the second is to go to a family, cosmetic dentist. What we see in the medical field is that people who have severe heart conditions go to a cardiology specialist for their heart treatments even though they continue to see their primary physicians on a regular basis. In addition, when a young family is expecting their child, they see an OB-GYN specialist for their questions and not a general physician. There is a reason for that. In straightening teeth, the orthodontist is a dentist who has twenty-four to thirty-six months of additional training specifically to straighten teeth and, when appropriate, to help with bone development. Most likely the orthodontist has treated hundreds or thousands of cases similar to your child's or yours. All that experience and training can lead to more predictable outcomes. The fact is that 100 percent of orthodontists are dentists, but only 6 percent of dentists are orthodontists.

To be sure that you are seeing an orthodontist, you could ask the doctor whether he has completed orthodontic specialty training twenty-four to thirty-six months past dental school. You can also ask staff members if the doctor performs dental procedures such as fillings, crowns, bridges, and root canals. Orthodontists almost never perform such procedures. Look around in the office for a display of the doctor's postdoctoral certificate of proficiency in the specialty of orthodontics and dentofacial orthopedics, and confirm if this is the twenty-four- to thirty-six-month training or a weekend course.

When you choose to see an orthodontist for your child's orthodontic consultation, your child will be seen by a specialist with twenty-four to thirty-six months of training specifically in orthodontics. A specialist can rule out potential problems at a young age. Teenage patients who want straight teeth will have an orthodontist create a customized plan for their individual needs. All that experience and training is invaluable.

Why is good diagnosis crucial for your final smile result?

The key to a radiant final smile that people notice from far away and compliment you on is good diagnosis. A good diagnosis is everything. The clinical aspect in orthodontics like putting on ties, changing wires, replacing the bracket, activating the expander, and fitting bands is very easy. The skill that makes orthodontics difficult is proper diagnosis. For example, you can choose one of two building contractors to do the foundation of your family dream house. Building contractor number one recommends you build your house foundation in a sandy area with a lot of underground water. Building contractor number two checked previous land history, made sure that there's no underground water, made sure that the soil is stable and can sustain your house, and then he recommends you proceed further with building your foundation for your family dream house. Who would you trust with this important job that your family livelihood depends on? Will the final outcome be different?



As a clinician you need to be able to diagnose patients with an increase in vertical facial proportions and not extrude molars in their treatments. You need to be able to diagnose patients with large mandibles (class 3 pattern) and to recognize the appropriate time for their treatments. You need to be aware that there's no ideal orthodontics system including clear aligners, there's no ideal bracket, and there's no ideal wire. You have to know and spend the time learning different techniques so that you can use the correct technique for the appropriate case. Those are just a few examples of the extra knowledge required for proper diagnosis.

What x-rays are required for a proper orthodontic exam?

Cephalometric and panoramic x-rays provide important diagnostic information. A cephalometric x-ray, which is a full side view of the head, provides information about the skeletal growth pattern, position of teeth, and bones that are too big, too small, too far apart, or too close together. A panoramic x-ray, which is a view of all teeth and top and bottom jaws, provides information about impacted, missing, extra, or misshapen teeth and short, long, or misshapen roots.

These two x-rays will be crucial in determining the appropriate diagnosis, and with the appropriate diagnosis, you can further determine whether your child will need *orthodontics*, which plainly means tooth movement, or *orthopedics*, which means that there is a skeletal imbalance that would require correction of bone deformities at the appropriate age. Sometimes treatment involves both orthodontics and orthopedics, and that's why it is important to have these two x-rays available.

As a caring parent, you can verify that both diagnostic x-rays are included in your child's exam. A cephalometric x-ray is going to look like a side-view picture of the head. A panoramic x-ray is going to look like a frontal-view picture of all teeth and top and bottom jaws.

This is important; again, those x-rays provide the orthodontist with all current dental and skeletal information so that he or she can identify, diagnose, and treat a wide range of dental conditions. Ultimately, diagnosis is the key—better diagnosis correlates with better outcomes.

Does my insurance cover braces?

As much I want to give you a specific answer, there's no simple answer for this. There are too many insurances and too many changes that happen within them, so my best advice is plan ahead and do some research when it's the appropriate time. It is not uncommon for most orthodontic insurances to cover some portion of your orthodontic care. It is important to plan ahead if you think that your child or you might need braces and select insurance with orthodontic cover. Also, check if your spouse's insurance has orthodontic cover.

Here are key tips when talking to an insurance agent:

- Please write down the date, time, their name, employee ID, and what they told you. If there is a discrepancy down the line, you can always go back and tell them to check their recorded phone line.
- Ask if there is a waiting period before the benefits kick in. Sometimes there is a waiting period before you can use the benefits.
- Ask if there is an age limit. Sometimes there are age limits that could exclude treatment benefits.

How can I save by using a flex spending account?



A flex spending account is a perk that some employers offer to their employees. In essence, you're able to pay for qualified medical expenses including orthodontic care with pretax dollars. When using a flex spending account, timing is critical. You need to be able to plan ahead and anticipate orthodontic care so that you can sign up, usually at the beginning of the year, for a flex spending account. It is not unusual for your employer to let you set aside from your paychecks tax-free \$2,500 and even \$5,000 to put in those accounts. Using a flex spending account can lead to large savings. Let's pretend your orthodontic-care investment is \$5,000, and you are in a 25 percent tax bracket. In the end this gives you a saving of \$1,000. A key thing to remember is that you use it or you lose it by the end of the year. If you don't use the funds in your flex spending account, they disappear. Your employer might offer an optional grace period for you to use the funds by March 15 of the following year, but again this is optional, and you need to check with your employer. Also, some employers optionally give you the chance to carry over, roll over up to \$500 unused

flex spending funds from your previous years, but again this is optional, and you need to check with your employer. If a flex spending account is provided by your employer, it is very beneficial and provides significant savings on your medical care including your child's or your new smile.

Where can I get help to cover my child's or my new smile?

There is good news! Major health-care financial institutions, including Care Credit, recognize that not everyone has set aside finances for major care. The days of you or your family needing care and there being no way of getting it are long gone. Naturally, many parents or adults prefer to invest in their child's or their new smile by using third-party financing. Financing with a major health-care institution provides you with great flexibility and freedom and keeps financial interactions with your orthodontic practice to a minimum.

I have no insurance; how do I save the most?

A good way to save the most is by making the investment in full by saving funds for a year or using your tax-return money. Some parents or adults prefer to save money for a year or to use their tax return to invest in their child's or their new smile. Investing up front can save you up to 10 percent on your orthodontic care. Having a new smile is more attainable than ever.

