The Ultimate Guide to Getting Braces

What Every Parent Must Know Before Choosing An Orthodontist For Their Family

Agustin Drubi, DMD

The Ultimate Guide to Getting Braces What Every Parent Must Know Before Choosing An Orthodontist For Their Family By Agustin Drubi, DMD

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Second Printing - March 2017 ISBN: 978-0-692-58380-7

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INTRODUCTION

I see hundreds of parents every week who have many questions about getting braces for their kids. I also see many adults who have been thinking about getting braces, but are not sure how to go about it. And I don't blame them!

They often wonder when is the best time to get started, who they should see for their orthodontic treatment, what options are available, what their insurance will cover, and how to afford this very important investment.

There is a lot of information out there, but unfortunately, a lot of it is mis-information. Patients often hear different opinions from their insurance company, friends and family, general dentists, pediatric dentist and even different orthodontists.

I decided to write this book to give parents the answers to these and many other questions that might come up when deciding to fix their kids' smiles. Throughout this book, you will find unbiased answers that will help you navigate through this very life-changing journey for you or your kids.

By the end of this book, I am confident you will have all the knowledge necessary to make the right decisions and be able to provide your kids with the best care possible.

PART 1 Why Straighten Your Smile

Chapter 1

Top Reasons To Straighten Your Smile

Let's face it, everyone wants to have a beautiful smile. Whether it be a crooked tooth, some spaces, or your bite that are bothering you, chances are you have been thinking about improving your smile for a long time.

When it comes to having a beautiful smile, the reason for most people to get it is obvious: to look better. But there also many other benefits of having straight teeth, many of which you might not have been aware of. These are some of the most important ones:

REASON #1: LOOK BETTER

We've all been there. You are talking to someone at your job, getting coffee with a friend, or maybe out on a date, and all you can do is stare at their teeth...

Research has shown that a smile is the first thing we notice when meeting someone. When asked to rank what they noticed first about someone else, people answered:

34% teeth
22% body
19% eyes
17% hair
8% skin

It has also been shown that it takes us 3 seconds to make a first impression.



A study looking at people on dating sites found that it is 57% more likely for people with nice smiles to get a date. Also, 38% of Americans said they would not go on a second date with someone with crooked teeth, compared to only 23% if they still lived with their parents!

Another major study was conducted by showing photos of people with and without nice smiles. People with nice smiles were rated as appearing more approachable, trustworthy, educated, honest, intelligent, happier, successful, and popular with the opposite sex.

REASON #2: FEEL BETTER



We all know that we smile when we feel good. But did you know we can also feel good just by smiling?

When we smile, our brains release tiny molecules called neurotransmitters. These neurotransmitters include dopamine, endorphin and serotonin. These pleasure inducing neurotransmitters are our body's way of letting our brain know we are experiencing pleasure, and are the major targets of many drugs available today.

These neurotransmitters reduce stress, relax your body, and even lower your blood pressure. Serotonin serves as an anti-depressant. In fact, many of today's anti-depressants work to increase the level of serotonin in your brain.

Research has shown that one smile can produce the same level of brain stimulation as 2000 bars of chocolate. Another study showed that one smile can produce as many neurotransmitters as someone receiving \$25,000!

Also, smiles are contagious! Smiles not only make you feel better, but also make everyone around you feel better. There are mechanisms in our brain that make us mimic smiles when we see someone smiling. Have you ever wondered why you smile when you see someone smile at you?

REASON #3: HEALTHIER TEETH



Keeping your teeth free of plaque is the best way of preventing diseases such as cavities, gum disease (gingivitis) and bone disease (periodontitis). Having crooked teeth creates areas that are difficult to reach and keep clean. This increases your chances of getting all these diseases.

Straightening your teeth will make the areas in between your teeth more accessible and easier to brush and floss, decreasing your chances of getting cavities and gum inflammation. It will also make your teeth self cleansing. (Did you know that one of the main benefits of saliva is that is cleanses your teeth?)

Having straight teeth also reduces the chances of food getting impacted in between your teeth. Many times, this can cause bad breath, inflammation, and even infection that can spread to other parts of the body.

REASON #4: LIVE LONGER



Did you know that there is a link between your oral health and your whole body health? Scientific research continues to find associations between cavities, gum disease and heart disease.

A report in the American Journal of Cardiology showed that people with gum disease are 24-35% more likely to have coronary heart disease.

This seems to be caused by the inflammation resulting from

gum disease. When your gums get inflamed (red and puffy) because of plaque build-up, it creates an environment where bacteria can live inside your body long term. This results in your immune system having to fight these bacteria constantly.

A study done by the American Society of Microbiology identified genes in certain oral bacteria that allow the organisms to invade and infect human arterial cells, weakening the walls of the heart.

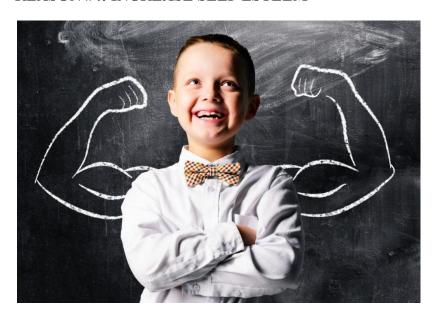
This level of low grade, long term infection, predisposes your arteries to atherosclerosis (build up of plaque and narrowing of the arteries). This build up of plaque can lead to heart attacks. Also, if part of the plaque build-up gets dislodged and carried to a blood vessel in your brain, it may also cause a stroke.

The good news is that research has shown that all these events can be reversed if good oral hygiene is improved and maintained.

A number of studies have found that blood sugar levels in diabetics with periodontal disease were significantly reduced when the patients' gum disease was treated. Also, multiple studies have shown that atherosclerosis can be reduced by improving oral hygiene and treating inflammation of the gums.

Having straight teeth can make it easier to brush and floss. And having crooked teeth can lead to cavities and gum inflammation, even if good oral hygiene is practiced. These new studies are continuously giving us insight into just how important it is to have straight and healthy teeth.

REASON #4: INCREASE SELF ESTEEM



Research has shown that people with nice smiles have higher levels of self esteem. It has also been shown that they are more likely to be outgoing, and better perceived by their peers.

The fact is that many kids are teased about their teeth in school. Many times, this can have a great impact on a child's emotional development that can even be carried on into adulthood.

Also, being afraid to smile can really interfere with your social life and how others perceive you.

Research has continually shown that having an attractive smile increases self-esteem and self-confidence. It has also been shown that people with nice smiles are more outgoing and social.

Many people also find that a beautiful smile leads towards

career advancements. A recent study showed that people with nice smiles are 58% more likely to have professional success, 58% more likely to get a job over someone with similar skill sets and experience, and 61% more likely to get a job where you interact with people face to face. it has also been shown that people with nice smiles earn more than people with crooked teeth. So when considering the cost of fixing your smile, also consider the cost of not fixing your smile, which can sometimes be huge.

REASON #5: HEALTHIER BITE



Aligning your teeth will also make them fit better with each other, significantly improving the health of your bite.

By making sure all your teeth are biting correctly, forces from chewing are evenly distributed around your mouth. This reduces the chances of your teeth being damaged from excessive force being placed on them. If too much force is placed on a tooth, it can sometimes fracture, requiring

extensive and expensive work to fix it.

An even bite also reduces the chance of bone loss around your teeth. This can be especially important as you age and the natural support for your teeth is already reduced.

Also, a good bite may reduce your chances of developing TMJ joint pain later on in life. Many people suffer from this condition, and having a healthy bite usually helps prevent these symptoms.

Your bite and mouth are connected to and have an effect on many parts of your body. A bad bite causes the muscles in your face and neck to be tense, and this can lead to neck pain and even headaches.

REASON #6: REDUCE YOUR RISK OF ACCIDENTS

Research has shown that teeth that stick out too much are more prone to breakage during accidents. This can many times be prevented by aligning the teeth so that they have better support if they are ever hit. Kids are very likely to be involved in accidents from playing around, which may result in injury to their teeth and costly fixes.

REASON #7: IMPROVE SPEECH

Some bites may make it harder for you or your child to speak correctly. Addressing these problems can improve speech and make it easier to articulate certain sounds. In many instances, a combination of orthodontic treatment and speech treatment is necessary to help kids get rid of their speech problems.

REASON #8: AVOID BAD BREATH

Bad breath, or halitosis, is caused by bacteria in your mouth. These bacteria are usually on your teeth and your tongue.

Having crooked teeth creates areas that are hard to reach, and can lead to an increase in the number of bacteria, leading to bad breath.



PART 2 Choosing The Right Time To Start

Chapter 2

How Soon Can I Tell If My Child Needs Braces?

This is one of the most common questions I receive on a daily basis and one of the most important for parents to know. While most kids will receive braces when they get all their permanent teeth (around 10-12 years old), there are some kids that will benefit from early interceptive treatment before that time. The American Association of Orthodontists recommends that all children receive an evaluation by an orthodontist **no** later than the age of 7.

At the age of 7, an orthodontist can start seeing problems develop that might affect your child in the future. Catching these problems early can help you avoid more complex treatments such as extractions of teeth or surgery in the future. It may also reduce the amount of time your child will need to be in braces, ultimately saving you time and money.

The best way to know if your child needs braces is to have an evaluation by an orthodontist. They will be able to tell you if your child is ready for braces or help you determine the best time to get started.

Chapter 3

What Are Some Of The Signs That Indicate My Child May Need Early Treatment?

As your child's teeth and jaws develop, there are many things to monitor. Paying close attention to their development and catching things that are wrong at an early age can be extremely advantageous in preventing more complex treatment when they are older. Below is a list of some of the signs that indicate your child might need early treatment. Please note that the absence of these does not necessarily mean that no treatment may be necessary, as there are many things that can only be detected by your orthodontist professional.

These are some of the signs to watch out for in your child that might indicate they need early interceptive treatment:

SIGN #1: FINGER SUCKING HABIT

A finger sucking habit can be really challenging to break. As a matter of fact, many kids have been sucking their thumbs since they were in their mother's womb.

As a first intervention, I always counsel parents on things they



can try at home to see if they can help their son or daughter stop the habit. There are also special appliances that go around the finger that prevent the finger being placed in the mouth.

For cases that do not respond to these, there are also appliances that can be placed inside the mouth that will prevent children from placing their fingers in their mouths.

SIGN #2: TONGUE THRUST HABIT

A tongue thrust habit is when the patient continuously places the tongue against and in between the front teeth. This harmful habit can sometimes create spaces in between the front teeth and even an open bite of the front teeth.

SIGN #3: CROSSBITES

A crossbite can present itself in two ways.

A posterior crossbite is when the upper back teeth are biting inside the lower teeth, as can be seen on the left side of the picture below. The right side shows the correct relationship.



An anterior crossbite or underbite is when the upper front

teeth are biting behind the lower front teeth, as in the picture below.



Both of these are extremely important to detect and treat as early as possible. Delaying this treatment may require surgery later on in life to correct.

SIGN #4: OPEN BITE



An open bite is when the front teeth do not overlap each other. This is in many cases accompanied by the tongue being placed in between the front teeth.

Many patients that have breathing difficulties or airway obstructions will place their tongue forward. This is done subconsciously because when the tongue comes forward, it opens up the airway in the throat in the back and makes it easier to get air into the lungs. The tongue being continuously pushed forward will, over time, develop an open bite.

This series of events show how an open bite might actually be the presentation of an airway or breathing problem. If this is the case, your orthodontist may refer you to have further studies done to see if any airway problems are present and to obtain treatment if necessary. The best specialists to diagnose this are ear, nose and throat doctors (ENT) who specialize in diagnosis and treatment of airway problems.

SIGN #5: DEEP BITE



A deep bite is when the front teeth overlap too much. This can sometimes be due to the fact that the lower jaw is smaller than it should be.

In severe cases, the lower front teeth may bite into the roof of the mouth and damage the gums there.

SIGN #6: DIFFICULTY BITING OR CHEWING

If your child is having difficulties biting or chewing food, it is a sign that they may need some kind of treatment to alleviate this problem, and a visit to the orthodontist is warranted.

SIGN #7: ESTHETIC PROBLEMS

We have already discussed how the esthetic appearance of teeth can affect a child's self esteem. Many kids are constantly bullied in school because of their teeth. Seeing an orthodontist will help you and your child fix this problem and prevent your child from being embarrassed or afraid to be bullied in school.

SIGN #8: SPEECH PROBLEMS

If your child has a speech problem, such as difficulty pronouncing certain letters or sounds, seeing an orthodontist will help fix this. Many speech problems are caused because the teeth are not fitting correctly, making it very hard to produce certain sounds. If treatment with a speech pathologist is needed, your orthodontist may recommend this as part of your treatment.

SIGN #9: TEETH THAT STICK OUT TOO MUCH

We have already discussed how teeth that stick out too much (buck teeth) have a higher chance of being damaged during accidents. If your child's teeth stick out too much, getting early treatment may help prevent this problem.

SIGN #10: SNORING OR BREATHING PROBLEMS

Snoring and breathing problems are usually caused by a problem in the patient's airway. If you or your child have any

of these issues, it is imperative that you see an orthodontist specialist as soon as possible.

In kids and adults, these symptoms can usually be caused by sleep apnea, a condition where the body stops breathing for prolonged periods of time while you sleep. This deprives the body of oxygen and can have devastating short and long term effects.

It is estimated that 1 in 4 children suffer from sleep apnea. Multiple studies have found correlations between sleep apnea and ADHD, bed-wetting, sleep-walking, retarded growth, hormonal and metabolic problems, learning difficulties, behavioral problems, and failure to thrive. There has also been a strong association between sleep disorders and obesity.

In adults, people who suffer from sleep apnea are 40% more likely to have high blood pressure, 34% more likely to have a heart attack, and 67% more likely to have a stroke. Also, severe sleep apnea increased the risk of early death by 46% percent.

Symptoms of sleep apnea include:

- Chronic fatigue
- Daytime sleepiness
- Loud snoring
- Awakening with a dry mouth
- Difficulty concentrating
- Headaches

 Waking up in the middle of the night gasping for air or short of breath

SIGN #11: SHIFTING OF THE JAWS

Shifting of the jaws may have two main causes.

It may be due to some teeth hitting each other before they should, causing the jaw to shift to one side to avoid this harmful force. If this is the case, the solution bay be to move a tooth, or in many cases, reshape it to avoid such contact.

It may also be due to the jaw growing more than it should, either to the front or in a sideways direction. In both cases, you should see a specialist as soon as possible to determine the best course of action.

SIGN #12: CROOKED TEETH

Crooked teeth is a condition that may be harmless and require no treatment until the patient is in their teen years.

In some cases, it may be a sign that not enough space will be available to fit all the teeth coming into the mouth. There are two possible solutions to this problem.

If the crowding is very severe, your orthodontist may determine that there will not be enough space for all the permanent teeth in the future, and may recommend extracting some teeth. This will help to create some space so that all the teeth coming in will have room.

If crowding is not severe, your orthodontist may work with you to help you create a little bit of space so that all incoming teeth will have enough room. In many cases, early treatment can prevent the need to extract teeth later on in life, and is one of the main reasons that early treatment is prescribed.

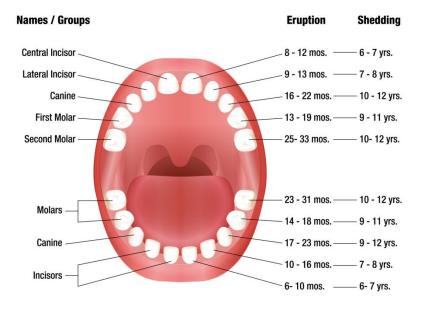
SIGN #13: EARLY OR LATE LOSS OF TEETH

Early loss of teeth is a very common condition when there is not enough space for all the teeth in the jaw. When a tooth is coming in, it may not only replace the tooth it is supposed to replace, but may also kick a neighbor tooth out. The problem here is that with the neighbor tooth gone, the one that is supposed to replace it will not have space in the future. Early loss of teeth may require early treatment to assure that all erupting teeth will have enough space and to avoid possible extractions in the future.

Late loss of teeth may happen when the tooth that is supposed to come in loses its way. This is a very common condition and one that requires extensive treatment. A tooth may actually come under the wrong tooth, high on the gums, or even in the roof of the mouth, leaving the original baby tooth in place for long periods of time. In an even worse condition, the lost tooth may not come into the mouth at all, many times requiring a combination treatment between your orthodontist and oral surgeon to be able to move that tooth into the mouth.

While some of these problems can sometimes be obvious to parents, there are others that only your orthodontist might be able to detect. The best way to determine if your child will need early treatment it to have an orthodontic evaluation by age 7, or as soon as possible after that.

Temporary Teeth Chart



Chapter 4

What Are The Benefits Of Early Treatment?

For kids that need early interceptive treatment, the benefits can be huge. Some of these include:

BENEFIT #1: CORRECT IMPROPER JAW GROWTH

One of the main benefits of early interceptive treatment is to correct improper jaw growth.

The upper jaw can have a deficiency in growing forward. This usually manifests itself as an anterior crossbite or underbite, where the upper front teeth are biting behind the lower front teeth. This may give the sensation that the lower jaw is too big, when in most cases, it's the upper jaw that is too small. The upper jaw can be stimulated to grow forward with an appliance called a face mask (pictured here) that is worn at night time only by the patient. This is one of the main conditions that needs to be treated early. Ideally, it should be

treated around the age of 7. This is because treatment effectiveness is greatly reduced around ages 10-11. If this condition is not corrected at this early age, it may require surgery to move the jaws into their correct



position later on in life.

The upper jaw may also not grow enough sideways, manifesting itself as a posterior crossbite, where the upper back teeth are biting on the inside of the lower back teeth. This can be resolved using an expander (pictured below). An expander is an appliance that is glued to the back molars and rests in the roof of the mouth.



The upper jaw is initially made of two bones that meet in the middle of the roof of the mouth. When kids are young, these two bones are not fused together, and can be moved apart. The expander puts pressure on the upper teeth to expand the upper jaw sideways, correcting the deficiency. An expander is effective only until ages 14-15, but is most effective when kids are younger, with an ideal time around 8-10 years old. This is because after that time, the two bones that make up the upper jaw fuse in the middle, making it impossible to separate

without the need of surgical intervention.

The lower jaw may also have growth problems. If the lower jaw is not growing enough forward, it may be fixed either at an early stage or during the teenage years. In the past, a headgear was used to be able to bring the upper jaw back, thus reducing the disparity between the jaws.

Nowadays, the use of headgear has largely been replaced by intra-oral appliances that aim at improving the growth and position of the lower jaw. If the deficiency is large, your orthodontist may recommend to perform treatment at an

earlier age to have the best chances of success. If the deficiency is only mild, it will usually be postponed until the teenage years and done in combination with the braces treatment. The most common appliance used is called the Herbst appliance, pictured here.



One last condition is where the lower jaw grows out excessively. This is by far the hardest condition to treat, as appliances have proven to be ineffective at restricting the excessive growth of the lower jaw. In these cases, your orthodontist will usually wait until the growth of the lower jaw is done, which can many times be into the early twenties. At that stage, the appropriate course of treatment can best be determined.

In all these instances, recognizing growth problems early in

life is beneficial. In many cases, it can avoid more involved and expensive treatment in the future, such as tooth extractions and surgery of the jaws.

BENEFIT #2: STOP HARMFUL HABITS

Harmful habits create many problems that are best treated early. For example, a finger sucking habit may create the following problems: upper front teeth that stick out too much, lower front teeth that lean back too much, spaces between the upper front teeth, crowding of the lower front teeth, an open bite of the front teeth, and a crossbite of the back teeth.

As you can see, one simple habit can have many side effects. Fixing the habit at an early age can prevent many of these from developing. Even if some or all of these have already developed, fixing the habit will many times partially fix them, making it easier to fix later. If these harmful habits are not fixed in time, it can lead to lengthier, more involved, and more costly treatment later on.

BENEFIT #3: IMPROVE APPEARANCE AND SEL ESTEEM

We have already discussed the ramifications that crooked teeth can have on a child's appearance and self esteem. Many kids do not openly talk about the effect their teeth may be having on them, mainly because they are embarrassed to have an open conversation with their parents about it.

Fixing your child's smile can give them the confidence to raise their hand in class, to be more outgoing, more confident, and more successful. I have seen hundreds of kids go through these transformations. Just a few weeks into treatment, I can already see how their attitude, confidence, and their whole demeanor changes.

I encourage you to talk openly with your kids about their teeth. If you think that they may be affecting their appearance and self esteem, I guarantee you that correcting their smiles will be one of the best investments you will ever make.

This is often the case in adults as well. My adult patients are some of the most appreciative patients we have. This is because when adults fix their smiles, they are usually fixing something that has been bothering them for years and sometimes decades! Taking care of this is like lifting a huge weight off their shoulders. Most of them tell me they regret not doing this years ago!

BENEFIT #4: LOWER RISK OF TRAUMA

Research has shown that teeth that stick out too much are much more prone to breakage during accidents. Correcting this condition can potentially save you money by not having to fix those teeth later on if they become damaged.

BENEFIT #5: ELIMINATE SPEECH PROBLEMS

Another great benefit of early treatment is to fix speech problems. Many times, the position of the teeth might not allow your child to produce sounds in the right way. The earlier the dental part of the problem is fixed, the easier it is for your child to improve his or her speech. If this is corrected later on, it may become very difficult to change. In many cases your orthodontist may recommend working with a speech pathologist. The combination of orthodontics and treatment with a speech pathologist greatly improves the success in these

cases.

BENEFIT #6: PREVENT LENGTHY, COSTLY AND INVASIVE TREATMENT

All the treatments we have discussed in this sections have the common benefit of preventing or reducing the need for more lengthy, costly and invasive treatment later on in life. Catching and fixing many of these conditions early will prevent many headaches later on in life.

As with most things in life, careful planning will pay off in the long run. Most orthodontists provide free consultations, and there is no downside to having your child evaluated by age 7.

While only a minority of patients will actually need early treatment or intervention, it is always better to be safe than sorry. Identifying potential problems early can help you and your child avoid more involved treatment in the future, saving you time, money and headaches later on.

What If My Child Is Not Ready For Braces?

The fact is: only about 10% of kids will need early interceptive treatment. While it is very important for these kids to receive early treatment, most kids will not be ready for braces at the age of 7.

Many parents are shocked to hear me say that we should wait to start their kid's treatment. Many of them have even been told by another orthodontist that they should get started right now!

This can be very confusing to parents, and I don't blame them! Receiving different opinions from different specialists can be very frustrating. In the long run, the main goal should be to achieve the best result in the fastest and most comfortable way possible. Make sure you discuss all the pros and cons of early treatment with your orthodontist. If the treatment suggested doesn't make sense, don't be afraid to seek a second or third opinion. This is a very important investment, and you should ultimately pick an orthodontist with whom you and your child feel comfortable.

If your child is not ready for treatment, your orthodontist might suggest to perform periodic evaluations.

Most orthodontist have recall programs where they perform periodic evaluations every 6-12 months to monitor how your child is growing and when is the best time to start braces. If your child is not ready for braces, your orthodontist might recommend for your child to be placed in a program like this.

Determining the best time to start treatment is very important for both you and your orthodontist. Starting at the right time can save you time and money in braces, and it can make treatment as simple as possible, minimizing the chances of gum disease, cavities, tooth sensitivity, and many other problems that arise from lengthy treatment.

How Long Does Treatment Take?

Orthodontic treatment in adolescents and adults usually takes between 12-30 months. The treatment time varies depending on the complexity of every case. Sometimes treatment might be longer depending on the circumstances.

Early preventive treatment at a younger age usually takes about 6-12 months.



Minor problems in adolescents and adults can sometimes be corrected in as little as 6-12 months in most cases.

Can Adults Get Braces?

Yes! In fact, over 20% of orthodontic patients in the US are adults! With the new advances in technology and esthetic options available, it has never been a better time to fix your smile. People often think that they are too old for braces, but this is not the case. You can get braces at any age.

In fact, adults are usually the ones that get the most satisfaction over straightening their smile. This is because most people with crooked teeth have always thought about fixing them but because whether they thought it was too painful, too expensive, or they were too old for braces, never got around to it.

Many adults are now realizing the benefits of a healthy, attractive smile, and are amazed by the change in how they feel about themselves after dealing with something that had been bothering them for years!

PART 3 Choosing The Right Orthodontist

What Is An Orthodontist?

An Orthodontist is a dentist who specializes in straightening teeth and making healthy bites. The name of the specialty is actually Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics. Orthodontics means straightening teeth, while Dentofacial Orthopedics deals with fixing and guiding jaw growth and other habits in growing children.

After becoming dentists, Orthodontists go through 2-3 years of additional education at an accredited Orthodontic Program to become Orthodontists.

Orthodontists not only deal with straightening teeth, but also make sure your teeth, jaws, gums and muscles work in balance to have both a healthy bite and an esthetic smile.

While general dentists are allowed to place braces, education in dental school is very limited in Orthodontics. That is why Orthodontist go through additional training to become specialists in this area, and braces is all they do in their practices.

There are a couple of ways to check if your doctor is a specialist. One way is to check their credentials and make sure they completed a 2-3 year program beyond dental school at an accredited institution. The other way is to look for them in the website braces.org. This is the website of the American Association of Orthodontists, an association that only orthodontists can belong to. This website has a search feature

to locate orthodontists in your area and also has a lot of educational material for patients.

Why Should I See An Orthodontist?

The answer is simple: because they are specialists in straightening teeth and making healthy bites. Dentists that want to become orthodontists go through an additional 2-3 years of formal training to become specialists. Orthodontists do not perform cleanings, fillings, or anything else that your general dentist does. They only specialize in fixing smiles and bites.

General dentists can place braces in their practices, but it can be challenging for a patient to determine how much experience they have, what kind of education they have received, and how competent they are. By going to an orthodontists, you can rest assured that you are seeing someone who has received extensive training in straightening teeth and can give you the best treatment possible.

Just like you trust a cardiologist with your heart and a dermatologist with your skin, when it comes to your smile, trust an orthodontist. You may visit the website braces.org, the website of the American Association of Orthodontists, to find an orthodontist specialist in your area.

How Do I Choose The Best Orthodontist?

When looking around your area for an orthodontist, there are many things to consider:

1. Do you like the doctor?

One of the main things to consider before choosing an orthodontist is whether you like the doctor. I suggest going for a consultation, talking to the doctor, and asking any questions you may have. Make sure the doctor takes the appropriate time to explain everything in detail. Orthodontic treatment can be a lengthy process, and you want to make sure you undertake it with someone with whom you feel comfortable.

2. Do you like the office?

Was the office clean? Do they use the latest technology available? Do they use digital x-rays? The office can sometimes tell a lot about the doctor. Make sure you pick an office in which you feel comfortable being treated.

3. Do you like the staff?

During orthodontic treatment, depending on the treatment philosophy of the doctor, many tasks might be delegated to staff members. In most offices, there will be a team approach to treatment. Make sure you meet and feel comfortable with the staff members.

4. Does the treatment suggested make sense?

Are you comfortable with the treatment option presented? Were the pros and cons of different options explained in detail? If anything doesn't make sense, I suggest obtaining a second or third opinion until you find someone with whom you feel comfortable.

5. Do they provide convenient hours?

Orthodontic treatment will require many visits, sometimes over years of treatment. Make sure the office provides hours that are convenient to you or your child. Many offices provide late night or Saturday hours to help you avoid missing work or school.

6. Did you have to wait a long time?

If the office does not run on time and you have to wait a long time to be seen, I suggest looking for another option. This can become very frustrating during the course of your treatment.

7. What kind of guarantee do they provide?

Does the doctor provide any guarantees for their work? How about after the braces are off? Also, make sure you ask about the price for replacement of retainers.

One of the main problems with orthodontic treatment is not only straightening teeth, but keeping them straight. As a matter of fact, 20-30% of my patients are adults who had braces as kids but never wore their retainers.

In our office, we have even created a program that will monitor and guarantee your smile for life! It sounds crazy, but in the long run, it may end up saving you thousands of dollars.

8. Do they offer all treatment options?

There are many treatment options available today. Make sure your orthodontist provides the one that you would like to use. Your will find a list of all these options in the later chapters.

9. Do they work with your insurance?

If you have insurance that covers braces, make sure you ask your orthodontist if he or she accepts it. Using your insurance benefits can greatly reduce the cost of treatment. Refer to chapter 18 to learn more about Insurance coverage for orthodontic treatment.

10. Do they offer financing?

While price should not be the main reason to choose your orthodontist, make sure they are willing to work with you to make this investment more affordable. Most offices will finance the fee over the course of treatment, usually leaving a small monthly fee affordable to most people.

PART 4 Treatment Options

What Treatment Options Are Available?

With the recent advances in technology, there are now numerous ways to straighten your teeth that can suit your lifestyle.

METAL BRACES



The vast majority of cases in the US in adolescent patients are still treated with traditional metal braces.

Metal braces have evolved with time and are now smaller, smoother, and more comfortable than ever.

The science behind the wires has come tremendous lengths in the last years, and newer wires that place gentler forces on your teeth are now available.

These advances make orthodontic treatment much easier and

comfortable to go through, and the old ways of tightening braces are no longer a problem.

The wire with these braces is held in place by a small rubber band. The color of the rubber band can be chosen by the patients and is one of the favorite things for kids to do with their braces.

SELF LIGATING BRACES



Self ligating braces are braces that use a gate to hold the wire in place, instead of the traditional rubber bands (In-Ovation® braces pictured above). This change reduces the friction in the whole system, and teeth are more free to move around. This results in many benefits:

1. The first advantage is that there is no rubber band to change, thus appointments can usually be every 8-10

- weeks, reducing the amount of school or work patients have to miss to come in for adjustments.
- The second advantage is that the wire is not forcibly held against the braces. This reduces the amount of force placed on the teeth, making them more comfortable to wear.
- 3. The third advantage is that these braces don't have a rubber band that collects plaque, making them much more hygienic and easier to keep clean.

Not all orthodontists work with self ligating braces. If any of these advantages are important to you, I recommend finding an orthodontist that offers them as a treatment option.

CLEAR BRACES



Clear braces work in much the same way as metal braces. The main difference is that they are made of a clear ceramic material, making them blend in with the teeth and look much more esthetic. They provide an esthetic alternative to

adolescents and adults that wish to straighten their smiles without having to go through a "metal mouth" stage.

Clear braces come in the traditional form (pictured above), in which a rubber band holds the wire in place, and in the self ligating variety (In-Ovation[®] clear braces pictured below).



One of the main problems with the traditional ceramic braces was that the wire was held in place by a little rubber band that stains over time, and can start looking not so "clear" after a while.

The staining of the rubber band was a major problem. It went from being clear braces to dirty braces, especially for people that frequently drink coffee, tea or wine. And that was not the only problem. The rubber bands lose their strength and need to be changed about every 4 weeks, requiring you to come in once a month for adjustments, many of them unnecessary.

This problem was solved with self ligating clear braces. Besides all the benefits outlined above, these braces don't stain. Patients are now able to eat and drink without fear of their braces staining.

INVISALIGN®



Invisalign® is a series of customized, clear aligners that move your teeth into position in an esthetic and comfortable way.

The aligners are computer designed and made of a clear plastic material that is virtually invisible. The aligners are changed every two weeks, and each one will move your teeth a little bit more towards a straight smile. Aligners have to be worn 22 hours a day. Adjustment visits are usually every 6-10 weeks, and about 15 minutes in length. Aligners are removable and no special diet is needed. Also, you can continue to brush and floss as you do regularly. And the best part is: Most people won't even know you are improving your smile! And since the aligners are clear, you can start seeing

results in just a few months!

These are the steps to getting your Invisalign® treatment:

- 1. First, your orthodontist will perform an examination and determine if Invisalign[®] is a good treatment option for you. There have been many advances in the Invisalign[®] system lately, and most cases can now be treated with Invisalign[®].
- 2. If your doctor determines that you are a good candidate, the next step is to have molds of your teeth taken. These molds are used to create an exact replica of your teeth.
- 3. The molds are sent to the Invisalign[®] lab, where it will be scanned into a computer to create a digital replica of your teeth.
- 4. A technician will move your teeth in the computer screen to straighten them. The proposed movements will be sent back to your doctor.
- 5. Your orthodontist will review the proposed treatment, and make any changes necessary.
- 6. Once your doctor approves the treatment, Invisalign® will begin manufacturing the aligners.
- 7. Approximately 4 weeks after the initials molds were taken, your orthodontist will receive the aligners and see you for a fitting. Sometimes, little tooth colored "bumps", called attachments need to be added to your teeth. These help the aligner grab the tooth to be able to

- move it better. These attachments are temporary and will be removed at the end of your treatment.
- 8. You will see your orthodontist every 6-10 weeks for evaluations and to receive new aligners.
- 9. After you wear all your aligners, your orthodontist will sit down with you and review the final result. In some cases, it may be necessary to order a few more aligners to fine tune anything that wasn't completely corrected.
- 10. After everything is perfect, your orthodontist will fabricate and deliver to you retainers to maintain the movements made.

Invisalign[®] has been used to treat millions of patients already. And with the continuous advances in its technology, there are now very few cases for which Invisalign[®] cannot be used. it has become the treatment of choice for most adults who wish to straighten their teeth but feared going through a "metal mouth" stage.

INVISALIGN TEEN®

Invisalign Teen[®] is one of the latest developments by Invisalign[®]. It is a system that works in the same way as the regular Invisalign[®], but includes a couple of new features to better serve teenagers. These include:

1. Compliance Indicators: these are blue dots in the back of the aligners that wear out over 2 weeks. This allows the orthodontist to determine if the patient is being compliant wearing their aligners.

2. Free replacement of aligners: allows the orthodontist to order replacement aligners if they are ever lost.

Many orthodontists have been hesitant about offering Invisalign® to teenagers. Their main fear is the possible lack of patient compliance. My experience has shown that teenagers are very compliant with Invisalign®. This is especially true if the appropriate time is taken to educate the patient on the pros and cons of this treatment.

HIDDEN LINGUAL BRACES



Hidden lingual braces are custom made braces that go behind your teeth. There are two main companies that fabricate these braces: IncognitoTM by 3MTM, and Harmony by American Orthodontics.

There are many benefits to lingual braces:

- 1. They are completely invisible, so nobody will know that you are correcting your smile.
- 2. They are always on and always working, and compliance is not an issue as it may be with clear removable aligners like Invisalign[®].
- 3. They are fully customized and computer made to fit your teeth perfectly. The wires are fabricated and bent by a robot, giving you a treatment that is specific only for you.
- 4. Total treatment time can be shorter than when using generic braces
- 5. Brackets are more comfortable than the standard brackets because they fit perfectly with your individual teeth
- 6. Fewer appointments are usually necessary since the brackets and the wires are designed to efficiently deliver your final result

The process of fabricating these braces is somewhat similar to the Invisalign[®] system.

- 1. First, your orthodontist will perform an examination and determine if lingual braces are a good treatment option for you.
- 2. If your doctor determines that you are a good candidate, the next step is to have molds of your teeth taken. These molds are used to create an exact replica of your teeth.

- 3. The molds are sent to the lab, where they will be scanned by a computer to create a digital replica of your teeth.
- 4. A technician will move your teeth in the computer screen to straighten them. The proposed movements will be sent back to your doctor.
- 5. Your orthodontist will review the proposed treatment, and make any changes necessary.
- 6. Using computer-aided design and manufacturing (CAD/CAM), 3D printing technology, and robotics, your brackets and wires are custom manufactured exclusively for you, to correct your exact condition.
- 7. Approximately 4-6 weeks after the initials molds were taken, your orthodontist will receive the braces and see you for a fitting.

The cons of lingual braces are:

- 1. Comfort: These braces are highly polished to increase comfort, but the fact that they are behind your teeth means that your tongue will rub against them. This can create some discomfort, especially in the first few weeks while you get used to them.
- 2. Speech: in a few people, braces behind their teeth can slightly affect their speech. In most cases, this goes away after a few days.

Regardless of these, lingual hidden braces have been gaining great popularity and are becoming one of the main treatment options chosen by adult patients.

PART 5 How To Pay For Braces

How Much Do Braces Cost?



Treatment cost will usually vary depending on factors such as the method of treatment used and the complexity of the case. It will also vary among different locations and practitioners.

The American Dental Association reported the typical range for traditional metal braces to be \$4,685-\$6,500 for adolescents in 2013.

At our office, we place great emphasis in providing excellent treatment at an affordable price, and our fees for braces range from \$3,500-\$4,500.

Treatment for premium services such as clear braces, Invisalign[®] or Hidden Braces will usually be higher, while cost for interceptive or limited treatment for minor problems will be lower.

While cost is a concern to most patients, it should not be the only determinant of which doctor they eventually choose for their treatment. Other factors such as office location, hours available, doctor reputation, insurance coverage, treatment guarantees, customer service, financing options available, and what the fees actually include should all be studied carefully prior to making a decision.

What Does The Fee Include?

Every orthodontist will set up their fees in slightly different ways. That is why it is very important you are informed about what the fee presented to you includes.

Most orthodontists' fees are all inclusive, meaning that the one fee presented will include everything that is needed during treatment. Others will break down their fees and charge for different things.

These are some of the things to consider if they are included:

- Initial consultation
- Diagnostic records (pictures, x-rays, molds, etc.)
- The braces themselves
- Retainers
- Emergency visits
- Breakage of appliances
- Treatment that takes longer than anticipated
- Any additional appliances that might be needed during treatment.

Finding out what things are and are not included in the treatment fee might avoid problems in the future and give you the peace of mind of knowing what to expect.

Insurance



Many dental insurance companies are now covering some of the cost of braces. Most insurance plans that cover braces are provided by employers through their work.

If your work does not provide dental insurance, or if the one provided does not cover braces, there are other options. You may be able to find and sign up for a plan that covers braces through the Health Insurance Marketplace at Healthcare.gov. One thing to consider when choosing an insurance plan based

solely on braces coverage is that most of them will have a waiting period before they start covering braces. The time will vary by plan but will usually be around 12 months. You should factor in the cost of having the plan for that time to see if it would be worth to get in the first place. Also, make sure you check the restrictions each plan has, such as how much they will cover, and which doctors they will allow you to see. Many plans will only allow you to see a specific doctor, so make sure if you already have someone in mind, that you will be able to see them with your new plan.

Most insurance plans will cover only part of the braces cost. Most plans will cover a percentage, with a lifetime maximum. The percentage usually ranges from 25-50%, while the lifetime maximum usually ranges from \$1,000-\$2,000. As an example, if your treatment will cost \$5,000, your plan might cover 50% of that, which is \$2,500, but since you have a maximum of \$2,000, it will only cover the first \$2,000 and you will be responsible for the remaining \$3,000.

To find out if your insurance covers braces, give them a call and ask them about it. You can usually find their number on the back of your insurance card. Your orthodontist will usually be happy to check on this for you as well.

To get the most benefit from your insurance, make sure to ask your orthodontist if they participate with your insurance provider. Failure to use your insurance coverage could cost you thousands of dollars!

If your insurance does not cover braces, make sure to also check your husband's or wife's. Many plans also cover family members or dependents.

Another benefit of getting a consultation early for your child is that it will allow you time to plan ahead. If your orthodontist tells you that your child is not ready for braces, but will likely be in 1-2 years, you can start planning ahead. This may include choosing a dental plan that covers braces through your job, or signing up for a new plan early. Planning ahead always has its benefits and can end up saving you a lot of money in the long run.

How To Pay For Braces With Your Flexible Spending Account

Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) are perhaps one of the most underused ways of saving money on braces. FSA are account set up through your employer, where money is set aside for medical expenses. This money is set aside from your salary before taxes, so everything you pay with it will result in tax free purchases.

The limit that you can set aside for the year 2015 is \$2550.

This is how it works: you tell your employer how much you would like to put aside from your paycheck and add it to your FSA. You will usually receive a debit card, which you can use to pay for medical expenses from the money you have set aside.

Here is an example of how using this resource can save you tons of money. Suppose you are paying for treatment at a national average of \$5,600, for treatment lasting 24 months. If your FSA is set correctly, it can be used to make two payments of \$2550, one each year. This will allow you to pay for most of the treatment (\$5100) using pre-tax dollars.

Now, suppose you are paying 20% of your income on taxes. This means you would be able to save 20% on the \$5,100 you spent, giving you savings of \$1,020.

You can probably start to see how big of an impact this can

have, and how much money you can save by using your FSA.

Not using their FSA accounts when available is the #1 Mistake people are making when paying for braces!

If you set aside money in a certain year, you have until the middle of March of the following year to use that money. Any money left in the account over \$500 will be lost. That is why it is very important that the FSA is set up correctly to allow you to save the most money, and avoid putting too much money in so you may not lose any.

Your employer will ask you, usually at the beginning of the year, how much money you want to put aside in your FSA. You may only have one chance of saying how much, unless there is a change in your family.

Planning with your orthodontist early can have huge benefits. Suppose your child will be ready to start treatment in the beginning of next year. He or she may be able to tell you how much the fee will be. This will allow you to set aside the correct amount for your FSA. Planning ahead will give you the greatest chances of saving as much money as possible by using you FSA, while avoiding placing too much money in it.

If you are not sure if your employer offers the possibility of a FSA, contact them to find out more.

Third Party Financing

Third party financing is when a financial institution agrees to pay for your medical expenses.

This is how it works: you or your orthodontist apply on your behalf for financing. If you are accepted, the financing company will pay for your whole treatment, and then you will have to pay the financing company monthly payments until the balance is paid off.

Many of these companies offer up to 24 months with no interest. Some orthodontists require a down payment. If that is the case, using this service would allow you to get braces without paying a down payment.

These companies will also finance up to 60 months with some interest. This will usually allow the monthly payments to be under \$100, making it a very affordable option.

Some of the most popular companies are Carecredit and Springstone. Not all orthodontists work with these, so make sure you check with them to see if they do.

In House Financing

In house financing is when your orthodontist agrees to finance your treatment. Most orthodontists will offer an interest free financing option over the length of treatment.

This is a great option if your credit score does not allow you to qualify for third party financing.

Making use of this option will usually bring the monthly payment down and make it very affordable for most families to provide braces for their kids. Most orthodontists are flexible in their financing options. Their main objective is to be able to provide this much needed service to as many kids and adults as possible. Be sure to discuss with your orthodontist your financial situation to be able to find a plan that you feel comfortable with.

Other Ways To Save Money On Braces

The following are many "insider secrets" that may allow you to save money on braces. Not all options may be provided by a particular orthodontist or be available in your area, but you will usually be able to take advantage of at least a few of these. Together, they should be able to save you a bundle.

WAY #1: PAYMENT IN FULL DISCOUNT

Most orthodontists will offer discounts, sometimes up to 10%, for paying the full amount of treatment up front.

Sold your car? Do you have a tax refund coming? If you can pay for treatment up front, it can usually save you a bundle!

WAY #2: FAMILY AND FRIENDS DISCOUNT

Do you have a few kids? Are any of your family members in treatment? Many orthodontists will offer discounts for siblings or family members of current patients.

If you have a few kids that need braces, most orthodontists will offer substantial discounts to help you afford treatment.

WAY #3: REFERRAL PROGRAM

Do you have any friends or relatives that are interested in improving their smiles? Most orthodontists have referral programs that will reward you for referring someone to their office.

At our offices, we have seen how many referrals can result in huge patient reimbursements, lowering their cost of treatment.

WAY #4: RETAINERS

One of the main objectives of achieving a perfect smile is keeping it for life! A sure way to save money in the future is to wear your retainers as instructed. This will usually prevent you from having to fix your smile later on in life.

Also, ask your orthodontist if you can get a set of extra retainer at the end of treatment. This way, you won't have to pay for new ones if you ever lose them!

In our office, we have even created a program that will monitor and guarantee your smile for life! It includes making you new retainers at no cost if you ever lose them or they stop fitting. It sounds crazy, but in the long run, it may end up saving you thousands of dollars.

WAY #5: DENTAL SCHOOL

Is there a dental school near you? Most dental schools have orthodontic programs. These are programs where people that are already dentists are going through additional training to become orthodontists. They are very knowledgeable and are supervised by a licensed orthodontist who will check all their work.

Appointments at a school may take longer than at a private practice since it is a teaching institution, but if you have time available, it may be a great option. Their fees are usually lower than you would find with a private practitioner. To find out if there is an orthodontic program near you, go to: http://www.aaoinfo.org/education/accredited-orthodontic-programs or perform a Google search for dental school programs in your area.

SMILES CHANGE LIVES®

Smiles Change Lives[®] is a program that connects families that cannot afford braces with orthodontists in your area that have volunteered to treat patients in need for free.

Participating orthodontists have agreed to screen patients in their area to determine their need. Smiles Change Lives[®] will also review your application and determine your eligibility based on treatment need and on financial need.

If accepted, you will be placed on a waiting list and treated as soon as possible, depending on the availability of providers in your area.

To apply to Smiles Change Lives[®], visit www.smileschangelives.org.

AFTERWORD

I hope you have enjoyed reading this valuable resource!

Fixing your smile can have a tremendous influence on people, both young and old. I hope reviewing the reasons to fix your smile discussed in this book have shown you the many benefits that this transformation can have on a person's life.

I have also tried to stress the importance of early examination in children. Receiving an evaluation by age 7 can have great benefits for both your child and yourself. Planning ahead of time and being prepared when the time comes will allow you to provide your child with the best care possible, so that they may achieve a beautiful smile that will last them a lifetime.

Discussing the different treatment options hopefully showed you how far orthodontic treatment has come in the last few decades. It is now more comfortable and esthetic than ever to achieve a beautiful smile. This is one of the reasons more and more adults are choosing to take on this great journey nowadays.

The ways to choose the right orthodontist in this book might be the most important section. Hopefully it has inspired you to look for the best doctor in your area, and to ask all the right questions to make sure you are choosing the right specialist. Performing your due diligence will give you great benefits in the long run.

The last section is this book dealt with ways to pay for braces, and ways to make braces more affordable. While cost is an important factor, it is hard to stress enough that the more important factor should be value obtained. I would urge you to explore all ways to make orthodontic treatment more affordable, without compromising the level of care you will receive. It can make a great difference to you and your family.

I hope all the information in this book has answered many of the questions you had about fixing you or your child's smile. While it may seem like a lot, taking the time to be informed and educated about your treatment will prove to be a great investment and allow you to provide yourself or your family with smiles that will last a lifetime!