

SPECIAL REPORT

DOES YOUR CHILD  
REALLY NEED  
**BRACES?**



**Baker** 

ORTHODONTICS

Smiles Created Every Day

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## How soon can we tell if your child needs braces?

Many parents want to know just how early we can tell if a child needs braces. That's a fair question and one that should not go unanswered. You need to feel comfortable and confident with the information you are receiving regarding whether or not your child needs braces.

According to the American Association of Orthodontics, all kids should have their first orthodontic check-up by the age of seven. I second that notion, and find that the age of 7 is the perfect age for an orthodontic visit. This is an important step in helping to ensure that your child's teeth are off to a great start and that they will have a healthy and attractive smile that will last a lifetime.

By taking the child to an orthodontist at the age of 7, we are able to see things that you may not be able to see on your own. By this age, children's teeth have developed to the point that we can see even small problems that may be associated with such things as emerging teeth or jaw growth. For most 7 year olds, their visit with the orthodontist is nothing more than an exam. However, there are a small number of children, around 5 to 10 percent, who can benefit from what we refer to as "interceptive orthodontics." There are potentially dangerous problems that we find and address, including:

- Jaw alignment problems
- Impacted teeth
- Chipped or fractured teeth
- Gum tissue recession

By addressing these issues above, we also help to alleviate social issues, where children may be the victim of teasing or bullying simply because of the appearance of their teeth. A child's teeth and smile can have a major impact on their wellbeing as they grow. With a beautiful smile, they are more likely to be confident and social, as well as gain a host of health benefits.



## What can go wrong at an early age?

As a parent, you may believe that you can look at your child and see if there is a problem with their bite. Sometimes that can happen, but there is a lot that cannot be seen, especially to the untrained eye. And it is these issues that make it important for a child to see an orthodontist for an exam.

Here are some of the possible problems that can go wrong at an early age:

- Thumb-sucking
- Difficulty with chewing or breathing
- Losing baby teeth too early or too late
- Having teeth that are crowded, loose, or have been blocked-out
- Upper and lower teeth that do not meet properly
- Improper jaw alignment
- Impacted teeth
- Tongue thrusting
- Severe crowding, with stripping of the teeth through the gum tissue
- Cross bites



As you can see, there is actually a lot that can go wrong, even at an early age. The best way to provide yourself, and your child, with a great smile and peace of mind is to opt for an exam with the orthodontist by the age of 7. Most of the time, children don't start getting necessary treatment at least until the age of 9, but it's important to catch problems early, so they can be corrected and won't lead to additional problems as time goes on.

Taking your child to the orthodontist by the age of 7 gives you the best head start on identifying and addressing any problems, so your child can have a healthy, beautiful smile!



## How many patients benefit from early treatment?

At this point, you may be thinking that all children will need to have orthodontic treatment early on. Relax, that's simply not the case, so don't spend your time worrying so much about all the "what ifs" associated with helping your child to get, and keep, a healthy and beautiful smile. In our orthodontic experience, we have examined many children and found that the number of them needing early treatment is quite low. In fact, out of the roughly 7,000 orthodontic patients we have seen, only 5 to 10 percent of them have required early treatment.

Keep in mind that while it's less than 10 percent for the number of children we see, this number can vary, as it is influenced by a variety of factors. Such things as geographic location and ethnicity, for example, can sometimes play a role and lead to a higher or lower number of children who benefit from early orthodontic treatment.



Generally speaking, most children do not need early orthodontic treatment, but unless your child is screened, you won't know if you fall into that 10 percent or the 90 percent. The key factor here is early detection, making it essential that children have their first visit with an orthodontic specialist by the time they are 7 years old.

Like most other health issues that can arise, being able to detect them early is the best way to address them. The only way you can detect them early is with an orthodontic examination. If your child has not yet seen the orthodontist, now is the time!

## Why choose a specialist?

Many people wonder why they should take their child to see a specialist, rather than just visiting with their regular dentist. While a dentist is a part of taking excellent care of your child's teeth, it is simply not enough. Seeing a specialist is crucial to ensuring that nothing is overlooked and that the best possible treatments are effectively selected and carried out.

To understand why a specialist is recommended, it is important to know what an orthodontist is and what they do. An orthodontist is someone who is a dental specialist. They have completed an additional 2-3 years of education beyond dental school. Their area of specialty and what they have intensely studied is learning all about the proper way to align the teeth and jaws.



Through the additional training that an orthodontist has had, they are able to identify dental irregularities, diagnose conditions, and treat the problem, through a variety of treatment methods available to them. An orthodontist, because they are a specialist, is able to identify, diagnose, and treat such conditions as:

- Difficulty with chewing, biting, or teeth that abnormally meet
- Grinding and clenching teeth
- Early or late loss of teeth
- Crowding, misplaced, or blocked-out teeth
- Speech difficulty
- Biting into the roof of the mouth or the cheek
- Teeth that protrude
- Facial imbalances

Throughout the health community, you will find that there are specialists. The dental field is no different. Orthodontists are specialists, who are able to take a more in-depth approach at diagnosing and treating any dental issues your child may have.

## What if my child really doesn't need braces?

Perhaps your child has experienced some of the conditions that have been mentioned. Or maybe there have been things that have made you think that your child may need braces, yet you have taken your child to the orthodontist only to find out that they don't need them. So where does this type of scenario leave you? Quite simply, it means you should work with an orthodontist to monitor your child's teeth! Treatment might be indicated later in life if the orthodontist detects any problems in future jaw growth or your child might simply be a candidate for retainers to maintain a healthy smile.

We always recommend that we continue to see your child to continue growth monitoring. This will give us important information about any possible developmental problems that may arise, including tooth eruption, jaw growth, etc. Continuing regular orthodontic check-ups is a part of a healthy lifestyle.

Ideally, your child should continue to have an exam with the orthodontist every 6-12 months, so we can conduct growth checks during the time that the teeth are erupting and the jaws are growing. The best practice, when it comes to putting braces on a child's teeth, are to do it at the "ideal time." The only way to pinpoint the ideal time is to continue with regular exams. Most orthodontists will provide complimentary exams, so you don't need to worry about incurring an orthodontic bill every 6-12 months.

Not only is it in the best interest of your child to put braces on at the "ideal time," but it is for the orthodontist as well. When we can zero in on the ideal time, it will end up saving us valuable chair time, and it reduces the overall length of the treatment. This is an important benefit because less treatment time helps to minimize the decalcification, or white spots, gum disease, sore teeth, and all the other problems that can occur when braces are left on the teeth too long.



## How do I pay for my child's braces?

How to pay for braces is one of the most common questions that I receive from parents. This is an understandable concern. We realize many families do not have dental insurance that will take care of the associated costs. Even those who have dental insurance may find that it covers only a portion of their child's orthodontic expenses. However, having braces is such an important issue, that if it is recommended by your orthodontist that your child have them, you should do everything possible to obtain them.



Getting braces is more than just an aesthetics issue, although that is also important. If your child has teeth that are crowded or misaligned, it can lead to issues with everything from being able to clean them properly to speech problems, making it essential that they receive the orthodontic treatment that is recommended for their condition.

Orthodontic procedures, like most other medical procedures, may cost several thousands of dollars, because of all the work involved. If your child needs braces, it can cost anywhere from \$5,000-10,000. The good news is that there are options for those who do not have the funds readily available to pay for the treatment.

Here are a few payment options to consider:

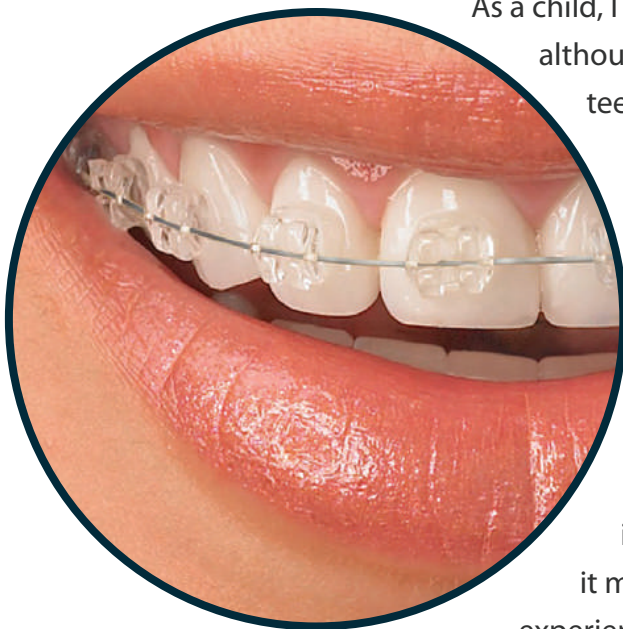
- **Flex Spending Accounts.** Many people are able to afford braces and other orthodontic treatments through the help of a Flex Spending Account (FSA). These accounts are set up through your place of employment and allow you to take pre-tax dollars to set aside and use for medical expenses. Because you never know when you may need this additional financial assistance, it's a good idea to get the FSA account started now. That way when you need it, the funds will be there.



## How do I pay for my child's braces? *(continued)*

- **Financing.** Third party financing for orthodontic treatment may also be a solid option. Whether it is a loan with family and friends or a personal loan obtained through a financial institution, you may be able to qualify for low interest loans that allow you to get the work done that your child needs, and you can spread the payments out over a comfortable period of time.
- **Payment plans.** Speak with your orthodontist, as most do offer some type of payment plan that will allow you to make monthly payments for treatment services. This is usually a service provided that is free of interest, and they are flexible in working with you to ensure you have a comfortable payment amount each month.

Paying for your child's orthodontic treatment may be a concern, but you shouldn't let it discourage you. The payment options are there to help you so that you can help your child. When you help your child get braces or other orthodontic treatment that they may need, you will be helping them more than you could possibly realize.



As a child, I needed braces. My parents paid for the braces, and although they may have realized that they were just fixing my teeth, they were actually giving me so much more than a great smile. In all honesty, I would pay multiples of what my parents paid in order to give my children the same benefits that I obtained from having braces. My parents paying for me to have braces turned out to be life changing.

Not only did getting braces as a child help me to be more confident, outgoing, and more socially accepted, but it also made me realize just how important something like a smile is in the bigger picture. It made such an impact on me that I made it my career choice, because I wanted to help give that life changing experience to other children everywhere.

Braces may not seem life changing when you are not the one needing them, but I can assure you that for those who need them, it's an incredibly satisfying feeling they get when treatment has been completed, and they can look in the mirror and love their smile. And that's just the aesthetic benefits. There are many health-related benefits as well, for those who work with an orthodontist to address dental issues early on.

When choosing an orthodontist to work with, opt for one that has plenty of experience, has worked with many children, and one that your child feels comfortable with. Depending on the treatment needed, your child may see the orthodontist regularly for several years.

I hope that you have found this special report helpful in answering some of your questions regarding whether or not your child needs braces. While I can provide some answers here to the most common questions, the best way for me to determine if your child needs braces is to schedule a complimentary exam.

We are ready when you are, so please call my office today to set up an appointment for your child's initial exam. We have helped countless other children, and by seeing your child by the time they are 7 years old, we can help ensure dental health that will give them a healthy and beautiful smile for a lifetime!

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