

About Orthodontic Treatment Guide for Patients

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Before Treatment Begins

This booklet is for patients – and for parents of young patients – who are about to start a course of orthodontic treatment. It will give you an idea of what to expect during treatment, and what will be expected of you. It also points out some risks and problems that may occur before, during or after treatment. You will read about risks that are common to most corrective dentistry, as well as risks that arise only with particular kinds of treatment.

Your orthodontist will devise a treatment plan just for you, involving procedures appropriate for your individual situation and goals. If there are hazards or limitations specific to your treatment, your orthodontist will explain them to you.

Orthodontic treatment is not an exact science. Like any treatment of the body, much of its success depends on the understanding and co-operation of patients. Please read this booklet carefully, and ask your orthodontist to explain anything you do not understand. Clarify what is expected of you as a patient, or as a parent of a young patient, to achieve the best results. Keep in mind that with orthodontic treatment, like other healing arts, results cannot be guaranteed.

Before treatment begins, you will be asked to sign an informed consent form on your own behalf or on behalf of your child, verifying that you understand the potential problems and hazards of orthodontic treatment.

Steps in Formulating a Treatment Plan

Orthodontic Examination and Orthodontic Records

The first step in determining your treatment plan is learning as much about your orthodontic condition as possible. This begins with an orthodontic examination, during which your teeth are inspected. Your orthodontist will then collect a complete set of orthodontic records, which may include plaster models of your teeth, x-rays of your head, teeth and jaw joints, photographs, and your medical-dental history.

Planning and Consultation

After examining you and studying your orthodontic records, your orthodontist will design a treatment plan for you. Your orthodontist will discuss with you any significant risks or limitations to your treatment and you will have an opportunity to discuss the points raised in this booklet. Your orthodontist will request your informed consent before implementing the treatment plan.

Dental Check-ups and Care

Before orthodontic treatment begins, it will be necessary to visit your family dentist for a check-up and any necessary dental work. Once orthodontic therapy begins, you will be expected to continue to see your family dentist for regular check-ups and routine care. Routine dental care will help ensure the best possible results from your orthodontic therapy.

What can you Expect During Orthodontic Treatment?

Discomfort

Orthodontic therapy uses appliances to move the teeth with gentle pressure. When braces are placed, or when adjustments are made, your teeth and gums may feel tender initially. The amount of discomfort varies from patient to patient, but usually does not last for more than two or three days.

Elastics

Your treatment may include elastics. Follow instructions carefully to achieve good results. Not following instructions regarding the wearing of these elastics could result in increased treatment time and/or a less than ideal end result.

Additional Records and X-rays

X-rays may be needed to monitor the progress of your treatment. In addition, after your braces are removed, your orthodontist will make a new set of records. These may include x-rays, plaster models and photographs. The new records will be used to plan your 'retention' program, to check for tooth decay, and to determine the position of your wisdom teeth, if applicable. These records will also be used to gauge what changes might occur in the future due to tooth movement or growth.

Removal of Teeth

On occasion, teeth may need to be extracted as part of the orthodontic treatment. Your orthodontist will recommend removal only if it improves your prospects of successful treatment. Missing teeth, on the other hand, can make therapy more difficult. In such cases, treatment compromises may be necessary and an ideal result may be impossible to achieve.

Timing of Treatment

Orthodontic treatment is appropriate when patients have baby teeth as well as permanent teeth. Your orthodontist will determine the appropriate timing of orthodontic treatment based on your specific needs.

Phase I 'interceptive treatment' may begin while baby teeth are still present. This treatment corrects harmful conditions or makes dental adjustments best taken care of while you are growing. Phase I treatment usually does not eliminate the need for later treatment of your permanent teeth.

In Phase II 'definitive treatment' full braces are used to adjust the position of your permanent teeth to develop a proper bite and achieve the best esthetics. This phase can start before or after you have lost all your baby teeth, and is usually necessary after Phase I interceptive treatment.

Retainers

When your braces are removed, you will wear a retaining appliance to 'hold' your teeth in position. Retainers are just as important as braces in the treatment plan. There are different types. Your orthodontist will choose the right one for you. You will wear your retainers to allow your teeth to settle into a better bite and for your bones and muscles to adapt to your new dental arrangement. Your orthodontist may evaluate your wisdom teeth during this phase of treatment. We recommend that retainers are worn every night until the age of twenty (or for one year if you are older) and then 3 - 4 nights a week for as long as you want your teeth to remain straight. Your retainers will need to be replaced from time to time. There is a charge to make replacement retainers.

What will be Expected of You During Orthodontic Treatment?

Your Co-operation is Essential

Generally speaking, excellent orthodontic treatment results can only be obtained with co-operative and informed patients and parents. Successful treatment is a team effort: patients, parents, staff and the orthodontist working together. The rewards? Your pleasing smile, your healthy teeth, and your glow of new self confidence.

For best results in the shortest time, you must:

1. Keep regularly scheduled appointments
2. Practice good oral hygiene
3. Wear elastics and retainers as instructed
4. Call the practice immediately should you experience loose or broken appliances
5. Eat a well-balanced diet

Your failure to follow these rules could force your orthodontist to change the procedures and goals of your treatment. As a last resort, treatment might have to be suspended. Premature suspension of treatment may lead to problems involving teeth, gums, jaw joints or severe relapse of tooth positions. The consequence of early suspension may be worse than no treatment at all.

Co-operation throughout treatment is your best guarantee of achieving a pleasing smile and a good bite. Please remember that following directions and recommendations are your responsibility. Your orthodontist will encourage you, but cannot assume responsibility for making sure you follow directions!

Teeth, Mouth & Jaw Problems Related to Corrective Dentistry

You should know about these potential problems before you start orthodontic treatment:

Cavities and Decalcification

Orthodontic braces do not cause cavities, but they do trap food particles and attract the formation of plaque which can increase the likelihood of you developing cavities or decalcification (white) marks.

Most patients are able to prevent these problems with a combination of proper diet, good tooth brushing habits and regular check ups with the family dentist.

You should brush your teeth 30 minutes after eating, using the proper techniques for brushing with braces. Excellent oral hygiene and plaque removal are musts. Remember to avoid sugar, carbonated beverages and snacks between meals.

Breakages (loose bands or brackets) can happen but are easily avoided if you take care about what and how you eat and you avoid chewing pens, pencils, fingernails etc.

If any part of your orthodontic appliance becomes loose, it is not an emergency and we will normally deal with it at your next visit. The use of wax is recommended to cover any areas that are rubbing or digging in. However, if you are concerned, please call the practice for advice.

Swollen Gums and Periodontal Problems

Your braces may touch or press on your gums in some areas of your mouth. This gum tissue may get sore and swollen if you do not brush well. Your gums and braces need to be brushed and cleaned thoroughly after eating to keep them healthy. Let your orthodontist know right away if you suspect you have a periodontal (gum) problem, (you may notice bleeding when you brush). Periodontal disease may lead to receding gums and gradual loss of supporting bone for your teeth.

Some people are more susceptible to the disease than others. The exact causes are unknown, but there are some well-established contributing factors, including unsatisfactory oral hygiene, accumulation of plaque and debris around teeth and gums, incorrect brushing and general health problems.

Always continue to see your general dentist during your orthodontic treatment so that gum health can be monitored.

Root Resorption

Root resorption is a shortening of the tooth roots. It can occur with or without orthodontic appliances and it is impossible to predict susceptibility to this condition. Some patients are predisposed to this occurring, while most are not.

Slight changes in root length are usually insignificant, but occasionally with severe changes, the longevity of the teeth involved may be jeopardised. The incident may increase with extended orthodontic treatment. Your co-operation during treatment is very important in the prevention of root resorption.

Ceramic Braces

Ceramic (clear) braces have been designed to improve aesthetics, especially for the adult patient. These modern appliances have helped many adult patients receive the benefits of orthodontic treatment without it being obvious they are in treatment.

Due to their brittle nature however, occasionally ceramic brackets have been known to break. Ceramic braces on the lower teeth may cause wear of the opposing teeth if in contact, or if the patient is a heavy tooth grinder. Enamel damage can occur at removal, but is uncommon. Your orthodontist will help you determine which braces will provide the best treatment results with a minimum of potential problems.

Loss of Tooth Vitality

On rare occasions, teeth that have been previously traumatised, have large fillings, or periodontal problems, may experience tooth discolouration and/or nerve degeneration during orthodontic treatment. In such cases, root canal treatment might be necessary to maintain the health of a tooth.

Teeth whitening treatment may also be recommended to restore a more natural tooth colour.

Impacted Teeth

Teeth are 'impacted' when they stay partially or completely under the gum. While impaction usually occurs when your teeth are too crowded for a new tooth to emerge, it can also happen for no apparent reason. Treatment depends on the cause and the importance of the impacted tooth to the jaw structure.

The most common impacted teeth are the 'wisdom teeth'. These teeth may not grow into place properly because the jaw does not have sufficient room to accommodate proper eruption. Your orthodontist may recommend their extraction.

An oral surgeon may be required to uncover and move an impacted tooth prior to tooth movement. The roots of nearby teeth may be damaged by the presence or movement of an impacted tooth. Not all impacted teeth can be successfully moved, which may necessitate their extraction.

Ankylosed Teeth

In some instances, teeth will not move because they are attached to the jaw bone (ankylosed). When a tooth is ankylosed, adjacent teeth may be forced to move, which may affect your bite. An ankylosed tooth may require surgery for movement into place or removal.

Injuries from Appliances

A number of orthodontic appliances are used in orthodontic treatment. It is important that you follow closely the orthodontist's instructions regarding their use. However, there is always some risk of injury in the use of appliances.

BRACES - Because your braces may project from your teeth, a blow to the face can scratch or cut the inside of your lips or cheeks. Loose or broken wires and bands can also scratch or irritate your cheeks, gums or lips. We recommend a soft wax to cover problem areas like this. If problems develop, call the practice for advice.

Dislodged or broken braces can be swallowed or inhaled. The risk of dislodging your braces is increased when sticky or crunchy foods are eaten. We will help you understand which foods should not be eaten when your brace is fitted.

RETAINERS - If your retainer breaks, call us as soon as possible to arrange for a replacement to be made.

Injuries During Treatment Procedures

Your orthodontic treatment may involve the use of instruments that could accidentally scratch or injure your mouth. It is also possible to accidentally swallow or inhale a small orthodontic appliance. Although your orthodontist will use great care in applying and removing your braces and other bonded attachments, damage may occur to teeth previously weakened by cracks in the enamel, undetected cavities or weak fillings.

Jaw Joint Pain and/or Clicking

Occasionally problems may occur in the jaw joints, sometimes referred to as temporo-mandibular joints (TMJ), causing joint pain, headaches or ear problems. Bite problems that occur with TMJ disorders are most often the result of the problem rather than the cause of the problems. These problems may occur with or without orthodontic treatment. Any of the above-noted symptoms should be promptly reported to the orthodontist.

Tooth Attrition and Enamel Loss

The biting surfaces of adult teeth are frequently worn down by tooth grinding or jaw clenching behaviour. Tooth interferences during jaw movements can also contribute to tooth wear. As your teeth move during orthodontic treatment, your bite will steadily change and new interferences may arise.

Halting enamel loss is not easy. It is difficult for orthodontics alone to establish a bite completely free from interference during jaw movement. Psychological stress or conditioned habits may be the cause of grinding or clenching. The biting surface of the teeth may need reshaping by special dental procedures. In some cases, an appliance to control the rate of enamel wear may be considered. Such procedures are beyond the scope of usual orthodontic therapy.

Orthognathic Surgery

You may need both orthodontic treatment and surgery to modify the size, shape, or position of your jaw. As with all surgical procedures, the risk of complications with oral surgery is a possibility. Discuss these risks thoroughly with your oral surgeon if your orthodontist recommends surgery.

Relapse Tendencies

'Relapse' refers to the movement of the teeth back toward their original positions after your braces have been removed. Ideally, your teeth should remain stable with retention. However, teeth can move at any time, whether or not they have had orthodontic treatment. The most vulnerable teeth are those in the lower front.

Periodontal disease, mouth breathing, and harmful tongue or oral habits can cause teeth to move. For these reasons, and many others beyond the control of your orthodontist, it cannot be guaranteed that your teeth will remain in a perfect position for the rest of your life.

Your teeth are unlikely to 'relapse' to their original position if you use your retainer properly; but if you do not, you may undo much or all of the progress you have made. Some patients must wear a retainer indefinitely to keep their teeth aligned. If you do not wear your retainer as directed, your orthodontist cannot assume responsibility for undesirable tooth movement. Make sure you keep appointments for retention checks as scheduled.