



# Orthodontic Treatment

## Understanding Braces, Clear Aligners, and Healthy Tooth Alignment

### What Is Orthodontic Treatment?

Orthodontic treatment is a specialized area of dentistry that focuses on correcting the alignment of teeth and jaws. Properly aligned teeth are often easier to clean, may improve chewing and speech, and can contribute to a healthier smile.

Treatment may involve **traditional braces, clear aligners, or other orthodontic appliances**, depending on each person's needs.

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### Why Might Someone Need Orthodontic Treatment?

Orthodontic treatment may be recommended to correct:

- Crooked teeth
- Crowded teeth
- Gaps between teeth
- Overbite
- Underbite
- Crossbite
- Open bite
- Jaw alignment problems

Not every alignment issue requires treatment, but some conditions may increase the risk of oral health problems if left untreated.

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### Benefits of Orthodontic Treatment

Properly aligned teeth may:

- Improve chewing efficiency
- Make brushing and flossing easier

- Reduce plaque buildup
- Lower the risk of cavities and gum disease
- Improve speech in some situations
- Enhance smile appearance
- Improve self-confidence

Treatment goals vary for each individual.

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## **Types of Orthodontic Treatment**

### **Traditional Metal Braces**

Metal braces use brackets attached to the teeth and connected by wires that gradually move the teeth into their desired positions.

Advantages include:

- Highly effective
- Suitable for complex cases
- Durable

Modern braces are much smaller and more comfortable than older designs.

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### **Ceramic Braces**

Ceramic braces work similarly to metal braces but use tooth-colored or clear brackets that are less noticeable.

They may be a good option for people who want a more discreet appearance.

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### **Clear Aligners**

Clear aligners are removable, transparent trays custom-made to gradually move the teeth.

Advantages include:

- Nearly invisible
- Removable for eating and brushing

- Comfortable for many patients

Successful treatment depends on wearing the aligners for the recommended number of hours each day.

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## Other Orthodontic Appliances

Depending on the situation, treatment may also involve:

- Space maintainers
- Palatal expanders
- Retainers
- Functional appliances

Your orthodontist will determine which appliances are appropriate.

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## At What Age Should Orthodontic Treatment Begin?

Children should receive an orthodontic evaluation by approximately **age 7**, according to recommendations from the American Association of Orthodontists.

Early evaluation does **not** necessarily mean treatment will begin immediately.

Instead, it allows the orthodontist to monitor jaw growth and identify problems that may benefit from early intervention.

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## Can Adults Get Braces?

Absolutely.

Orthodontic treatment is not only for children and teenagers.

Many adults choose braces or clear aligners to improve:

- Tooth alignment
- Bite function

- Oral health
- Smile appearance

Healthy teeth and gums are important before treatment begins.

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## How Long Does Treatment Take?

Treatment time varies depending on:

- Age
- Complexity of the case
- Type of appliance
- Patient cooperation

Many treatments take **12 to 24 months**, although some are shorter or longer.

Your orthodontist can provide a personalized estimate.

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## Caring for Your Teeth During Treatment

Excellent oral hygiene is essential.

People wearing braces should:

- Brush after meals when possible.
- Use fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean carefully around brackets and wires.
- Floss daily using floss threaders or other recommended tools.
- Attend regular adjustment appointments.

Poor oral hygiene during orthodontic treatment increases the risk of cavities and gum disease.

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## Foods to Avoid with Braces

Certain foods may damage braces.

Examples include:

- Hard candy
- Ice
- Popcorn kernels
- Sticky candy
- Chewing gum
- Whole nuts
- Very hard bread crusts

Your orthodontist will provide specific dietary instructions.

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## What Happens After Braces?

Once active treatment is complete, most patients receive **retainers**.

Retainers help maintain the new tooth positions while the surrounding bone and tissues stabilize.

Without retainers, teeth may gradually shift over time.

Your orthodontist will provide instructions on how often they should be worn.

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## Common Myths

**"Braces are only for teenagers."**

**False.**

Orthodontic treatment can be successful at almost any age if the teeth and gums are healthy.

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**"Clear aligners work for every case."**

**False.**

Although clear aligners are effective for many patients, some complex cases may require braces or other orthodontic appliances.

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**"Once braces come off, treatment is finished."**

**False.**

Wearing retainers is an important part of maintaining treatment results.

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## Key Takeaways

- ✓ Orthodontic treatment improves the alignment of teeth and jaws.
  - ✓ Both braces and clear aligners are effective treatment options.
  - ✓ Children should receive an orthodontic evaluation by about age 7.
  - ✓ Adults can also benefit from orthodontic treatment.
  - ✓ Good oral hygiene is essential throughout treatment.
  - ✓ Wearing retainers helps maintain long-term results after braces or aligners.
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## References

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