

Orthodontics: Getting it Straight



An Oral Health
Discussion Guide
for Grades 7-8

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Introduction

Can anyone tell me what the word orthodontics means? “Ortho” means straight and “dont” means tooth, so it literally means “straight tooth.” At your age, either you or someone you know has braces. According to recent research in the U.S., about 80% of teenagers wear braces and about 50% of the general adult population wears braces.

Braces are really useful tools that help straighten your teeth and improve your bite as well as your smile. They can make you look and feel a lot better about yourself. So let’s take a look at the kinds of problems that need orthodontic treatment, what causes them and how they can affect your mouth and the different types of methods used to straighten teeth.

Orthodontic Problems

- We can inherit bad bites (malocclusion) from our parents or from harmful habits we have as children. The types of problems we inherit include teeth that have too much or too little space in between them, extra or missing teeth, overbites, underbites and deep bites. For example, if you inherit big teeth from your mother and a small jaw/mouth from your father, there may not be room for all of your teeth in your mouth without aligning them or straightening them.
- Crooked teeth can cause a variety of problems in your mouth. It’s difficult to keep teeth and gums clean when your teeth are crooked or crowded. This increases your risk of tooth decay and gum disease. If chewing bothers you because of a bad bite, you may not want to eat nutritious high-fiber foods such as celery or apples. A poor bite also can put strain on or interfere with the development of your jaw. If your teeth stick out from your mouth, they could chip or break easily. In addition, teeth that are not in the right position wear down faster than teeth that are aligned correctly.
- Teeth can be out of position in many ways. Overbites occur when your upper jaw is too far in front of your lower jaw, or the lower jaw is too far back. Underbites happen when the lower jaw is too far in front or the upper jaw is too far back. Open bites occur when the back teeth make contact and the front or side teeth do not.

Orthodontic Methods

- For orthodontic treatment to be successful, the dentist must first gather a lot of information about you and your teeth. This includes obtaining an extensive dental history and examination, making plaster models of your teeth, taking photos of your face and teeth, and X-rays of your mouth and head from various angles.
- Treatment usually involves braces or other devices that slowly move your teeth to the correct position. Braces are made up of brackets and wires that can be tightened periodically as your teeth move. Brackets hold the wires and are glued to your teeth. Brackets can be clear or tooth colored so they aren't as noticeable. Wires used today are thinner and stronger than those used in the past. They are so strong that they shorten the time needed to straighten your teeth. Rubber bands are also used with wires to apply more pressure to teeth.
- Treatment time for your age group, preteens and teenagers, usually takes 18-30 months. A beautiful and functional smile can improve the way a person feels about himself or herself. Studies show people who are proud of the way their teeth look, smile more. And who doesn't need the positive feelings of a healthy smile and better self-esteem!

Conclusion

Orthodontics is a very useful, important way to straighten your teeth. What does orthodontics mean? Problems in our mouth can be inherited or acquired. Which problems are inherited? Which are acquired? Do you remember the types of information the dentist needs before you can be treated? How are braces constructed? Straightening our teeth can help us keep a strong, straight smile for years to come.

Special Activities

- Ask someone in the class who has braces to discuss what the process is like for them. How do they keep their braces clean?
- Ask an orthodontist to visit the class and explain the orthodontic process.
- Instruct students to write a skit about a person who has crooked teeth. How does that person feel before and after braces?
- Ask students who are going to get their braces off to bring in "before" and "after" pictures to show the difference that braces make.