

PATIENT'S PAGE



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BRACES AND DENTAL HEALTH – what you should know...

ORTHODONTIC TREATMENT

Orthodontic treatment is used to correct a “bad bite.” This condition, known as a malocclusion, involves teeth that are crowded or crooked. In some cases, the upper and lower jaws may not meet properly and although the teeth may appear straight, the individual may have an uneven bite.

Protruding, crowded or irregularly spaced teeth and jaw problems may be inherited. Thumb-sucking, losing teeth prematurely and accidents can also lead to these conditions. Correcting the problem can create a nice-looking smile, but more important, orthodontic treatment results in a healthier mouth. That’s because crooked and crowded teeth make cleaning the mouth difficult. Untreated orthodontic problems may lead to tooth decay, gum disease, destruction of the bone that holds teeth in place, and chewing and digestive difficulties. Orthodontic problems can cause abnormal wear of tooth surfaces, inefficient chewing function, excessive stress on gum tissue and the bone that supports the teeth, or misalignment of the jaw joints, sometimes leading to chronic headaches or pain in the face or neck. Treatment by an orthodontist to correct a problem early may be less costly than the restorative dental care required to treat more serious problems that can develop in later years.

WHAT TO EXPECT, WHAT TO AVOID

Although treatment plans are customized for each patient, most people wear their braces for one to three years depending on the conditions that need correcting. This is followed by a period of wearing a retainer that holds the teeth in their new positions. Although a little discomfort is expected during treatment, today’s braces are more comfortable than ever before. Newer materials apply a constant, gentle force to move teeth and usually require fewer adjustments.

Brushing and flossing remove plaque, a sticky film of bacteria that forms on teeth. Patients with braces should maintain a balanced diet and limit between-meal snacks. Your dentist may recommend avoiding certain foods that could interfere with braces or accidentally bend the wires. These foods may include nuts, popcorn, hard candy, ice and sticky foods like chewing gum, caramel or other chewy candy.

If you ever have a loose wire or bracket, or a wire that is poking you, you should see the orthodontist right away to get it taken care of. If your orthodontist can’t find a problem, he or she may give you some soft wax that you can stick on the bracket that’s bothering you. Then it won’t rub against your mouth.

Orthodontic treatment time varies from patient to patient. The dentist has specific treatment goals in mind, and treatment typically continues until the goals are achieved. The result will be worth the wait!

Straight teeth help an individual to effectively bite, chew and speak. Straight teeth contribute to healthy teeth and gums. Properly aligned teeth and jaws may alleviate or prevent physical health problems. Teeth that work better also tend to look better. An attractive smile is a pleasant “side effect” of orthodontic treatment.

Straight teeth are less prone to decay, gum disease and injury.