

ORTHODONTICS SERIES

# Child orthodontics

Malocclusion is the dental term for teeth that don't fit together properly. Literally, malocclusion means "bad bite." Orthodontics is the branch of dentistry that corrects malocclusions to bring your child's teeth into proper alignment.

Some children are lucky and naturally have straight teeth. Others aren't so lucky. The size of a child's teeth and how they fit into the jaw are inherited traits, and malocclusion can often affect several generations. Besides genetics, a bad bite can also be caused by:

- Accidents or disease.
- A missing tooth, allowing the teeth around the open space to shift. This is especially likely in children when some of their adult teeth come in late.
- Habits, such as thumb sucking, which can put pressure on teeth.



Checking for malocclusion



Straightening smiles



A great new smile!

There are many types of malocclusions. Your child's upper or lower jaw may be too far out or too far in. There may not be enough space in his or her mouth for the adult teeth to develop properly, leading to crowding. On the other hand, there might be too much space between the teeth, allowing them to shift. Your child's teeth may also be in crossbite, which means that one or more of the upper teeth bite inside the lower teeth instead of on top of them.

We recommend starting most orthodontic treatment between 10 and 14 years of age, when the mouth is still developing and teeth are more easily straightened. Early treatment can prevent more extensive and costly treatment later, when your child becomes an adult.

A malocclusion that isn't corrected can really affect your child's confidence, profile, and appearance. Poorly aligned teeth can also contribute to tooth decay, bone destruction, loss of teeth, and jaw-joint problems. These may in turn cause headaches, difficulty in opening and closing the mouth, clicking and popping sounds, and sore and painful jaw muscles.

Correcting your child's bite through orthodontic treatment can improve her dental health, and has the added bonus of boosting self-confidence and creating a terrific-looking smile.