Kids & Orthodontics

Everything you need to know about orthodontic treatment for your family

Australian Society of Orthodontists

Your smile is one of your most important features. It's one of the first things we notice when we greet someone, it's the way we remember one another, and it's the way we interact with strangers, friends and family.

Every parent wants to see their child smile with confidence, so it's no surprise that more and more Australian families are looking for information about orthodontics.

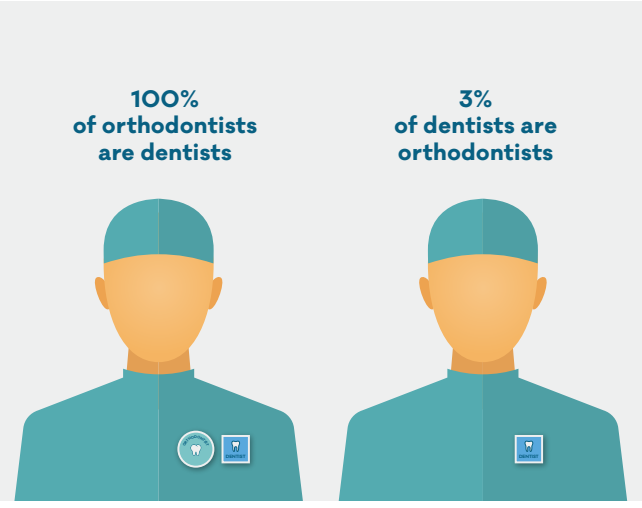
Did you know that kids should have an orthodontic assessment between the ages of 7-10? Or that no referral is needed to see an orthodontist? Did you know some orthodontic problems can be easily corrected when treated at an early age?

If you answered 'no' to any of the above, don't worry, you're not alone! Most Aussie parents are a little confused when it comes to understanding orthodontics, which is why we've put this e-book together to ensure your journey ahead is as smooth (and cost-effective) as possible.

First things first — what is an orthodontist?

Orthodontists are specialists. They are experts in their field, and although orthodontists and dentists share many similarities, specialisation is what sets an orthodontist apart from a dentist.

On top of their general dental degree, orthodontists complete an additional three years of full-time university training. They also limit their practice to only orthodontic treatment so that is all they do all day, every day. Only an orthodontist has been specifically trained and is the most qualified and experienced person to treat issues to do with the alignment of teeth and jaws to ensure your child ends up with a healthy and confident smile.



Why are teeth crooked?

Although this is a very common question, unfortunately, there's no one-size-fits-all answer. Teeth can grow incorrectly for a number of reasons, including:

Genetics: When extra teeth or abnormally large teeth create a crooked smile, genetics is usually at play. In most cases, underbites, overbites and crooked teeth are inherited and can't be avoided, but can be treated!

Environmental reasons: While there are usually no ill-effects from thumb sucking in early childhood, if thumb sucking continues past the age of 5 or 6 (when adult teeth are coming through) there can be severe misalignment of front teeth and adverse changes to the bite.

Care of baby teeth is also important, as baby teeth act as space maintainers for future adult teeth. If a child loses a baby tooth too early, the adjacent teeth can drift into the empty space, reducing the space available later when the adult tooth is ready to erupt.

Ear nose and throat/chronic mouth breathing problems can also cause changes to the growth of the teeth and jaws.

Signs your child might benefit from an early orthodontic assessment

Think your child might need to see an orthodontist? Below are some tell-tale signs to look out for:

- Crowded, crooked or misplaced teeth
- Protruding teeth
- Early, late or irregular loss of baby teeth
- Underbite or overbite
- Jaws and teeth that are out of proportion to the rest of the face
- Thumb sucking beyond the age of 5
- Difficulty in chewing or biting
- Mouth breathing

What age should I take my child to the orthodontist?

Although early orthodontic treatment won't be needed for all youngsters, taking your child to see an orthodontist between the ages of 7-10 will give the orthodontist a chance to assess the alignment of your child's teeth and jaws and determine if and when early intervention is needed.

Some (but not all) orthodontic problems can be easily corrected when treated in young growing jaws. Waiting until the teenage years to see an orthodontist for the first time can result in further worsening of these early problems, resulting in more complicated treatment methods which would otherwise have been avoided.

Benefits of orthodontic treatment

In addition to psychological benefits such as improved self-confidence, there are also a number of health benefits to straighter teeth, the main reason being straight teeth are easier to clean (reducing the chances of tooth decay and gingivitis).

An orthodontist can also help in the diagnosis and management of obstructive sleep apnoea and can help manage persistent thumb and finger sucking habits in children. They can also assist in the diagnosis and treatment of speech, breathing or chewing difficulties.

Are metal braces the best option for my child?

Most adolescents needing treatment will have metal braces, which are still the best option for a number of reasons:

- **Reliability:** While removable plates may sometimes be less noticeable than traditional braces, fixed braces are best for adolescents as they generally produce far superior treatment results and also eliminate any temptation to be removed (giving peace of mind to parents!)
- **Individual style:** While it's more than likely your child will be sharing their braces experience with lots of their friends, they have the option of choosing their own colored rubber bands (known as elastics) for a fun, bright, and individualised smile
- **Cost & time:** Metal braces are the most cost-effective and time-effective treatment option

For those children or teenagers who feel particularly self-conscious about metal braces, ceramic braces might be a good option – they produce exactly the same treatment result as regular metal braces and are less noticeable, however they cost a little more than traditional metal braces.

How much do braces cost?

It's the first thing parents want to know – how much does braces treatment actually cost?

Without an initial consultation, however, it's near impossible to determine the cost of braces treatment as each case differs from one to the next and there's no 'one size fits all' price. It would be a little like calling a builder and asking how much it's going to cost to renovate your home – the cost is absolutely dependent on the individual situation and the type of work needed!

That said, when it comes to traditional metal braces (the most common course of treatment for adolescents), anywhere between $5,000 and $9,000 for a standard 18 month treatment plan can be expected.

If you have health insurance you may be entitled to claim a portion of the treatment cost back from your health fund, but because every case is different, it's important to check with your fund prior to starting treatment.

What to expect during consultations and treatment appointments

Orthodontic consultation

Your child's first orthodontic consultation is the first step towards them achieving a beautiful smile. Each orthodontic practice varies in how they conduct their consultations, but most will conduct the consultation in two parts:

1. A dental hygienist will take x-rays, photographs and digital scans (or plaster moulds) of your child's teeth, which will then be given to the orthodontist to evaluate and share with you in the second part of your consultation.

2. You'll then meet your orthodontist and have the chance to address any concerns you may have before they assess your child's teeth, gums, facial shape and bite. Your orthodontist will then be able to determine whether treatment is needed.

An orthodontic appointment generally takes 30 – 60 minutes and we recommend booking well in advance (especially if you'd like an appointment during school holidays!).

Treatment appointments

Your child or teen may find themselves a little nervous in the lead up to the fitting of their braces, but it's important to remind them that there is no need to panic as the actual process is completely painless. No needles, no drilling! Just a fiddly procedure that requires them to sit as still as possible for between 30 – 60 minutes.

For metal braces, small metal brackets will be glued to the teeth and are then connected with a thin wire, which is adjusted every regularly to gradually straighten teeth. Once braces are fitted, your orthodontist will chat to your child about how to care for their new braces and provide them with all necessary cleaning products and after-care information.

Your child may experience a little discomfort after they receive their braces for the first time. We recommend Panadol or Nurofen to manage any tenderness (which will subside within a few days).

Adjustment appointments will also be required every 5 to 6 weeks, where your orthodontist will change or adjust the wires to keep the movement of your child's teeth in the right direction.

Tips for living with braces

For the best results possible, ASO orthodontists recommends your child maintains excellent oral hygiene throughout treatment, follows instructions about their orthodontic dietary requirements and wears their retainer correctly once treatment is complete.

It's important to remember that your child can still enjoy their favourite sports and foods with braces, all it takes is a little pre planning...

Food

After your child first gets their braces on (and after each adjustment appointment) it's a good idea to have some braces-friendly meals ready to go at home. Foods to avoid, eat carefully and eat freely are outlined below:

Try to avoid!

Hard foods: candy canes, ice cubes, crusty bread and biscuits

Sticky foods: sticky caramels, chewy sweets and toffees

Sugary foods: sweets, lollies and sugary drinks (particularly soda and sports/energy drinks)

Eat carefully!

Meats: Steak, ribs and chops should be cut into smaller, more manageable pieces.

Nuts and crackers: While most nuts are best avoided, soft walnuts can usually be eaten safely. Small crackers and corn chips with salsa and guacamole make for delicious snacks!

Crunchy veggies: Raw veggies like carrots or celery, and fruits such as apples should be cut up into small pieces and eaten with care

Go for seconds!

Seafood and meats: Turkey, chicken, ham, salmon, tuna, fish and scallops

Dairy foods: cream cheese, custard, ice cream, yoghurt and milkshakes

Soft grains: Soft breads, tortillas, muffins, pancakes, cooked pasta and rice

Fruits and veggies: Soft cooked vegetables, mashed potatoes and steamed greens, as well as softer fruits including applesauce, bananas, berries and fruit juice

Sport

While your child is wearing braces they can still participate in their favourite sports, as long as they're protecting their teeth with an orthodontic mouthguard. Your orthodontist can advise what type of mouthguard is best for your child and when they should be wearing it, depending on what sports they play.

Hygiene

Brushing and flossing are very important parts of your child's oral health routine, regardless of whether they're undertaking orthodontic treatment or not. Because flossing with regular floss can be a little difficult with braces, you might want to consider an orthodontic floss threader which is an inexpensive and disposable tool available in nearly any store that sells toothbrushes and toothpaste.

For optimum care and treatment outcomes, as well as ongoing dental health, your child should be seeing their general dentist regularly throughout their orthodontic treatment.

Over to you

This e-book is designed as a guide to help parents navigate the orthodontic journey ahead – we hope we've been able to answer some of your questions.

Braces treatments are an overwhelmingly positive investment in your child's future health and happiness. A confident smile has the potential to be their best and most memorable asset – one they will surely thank you for down the track!

When it comes to treatment options and payment plans, your orthodontist will happily talk you through your options, answer any questions and do all they can to ensure you're comfortable moving forward.

If you're unsure of where to find a registered orthodontist near you, check the Find An Orthodontist tool on the ASO website.

Australian Society of Orthodontists

The Australian Society of Orthodontists (ASO) is the peak body for Orthodontists and orthodontic knowledge across Australia.

Orthodontics Australia by the ASO, is the ASO's public information and advice channel. Our blog and social media platforms have been designed to assist your research efforts and help you understand the difference between an orthodontist and a dentist, your orthodontic treatment options, the results you can expect and the journey along the way.

Of course, we can help you find registered orthodontists too with no referral needed! We hope you find this resource helpful and it gives you the confidence to take the next step in achieving the smile you've always wanted.

Visit aso.org.au for more information.
Search: Orthodontics Australia - by ASO
(02) 9965 7250