

Orthodontics

Orthodontics is a dental specialty responsible for the diagnosis, prevention, management, and correction of misaligned teeth and jaws, facial irregularities, and uneven bite patterns. An orthodontist is a dentist who has extended, specialized training in this practice. With education and training, a general dentist may also perform orthodontics. Individuals at any age can benefit from orthodontic treatment if recommended; however, early intervention, before skeletal growth has completed, offers the most favourable results.

WHY ORTHODONTIC TREATMENT?

- Enhance self-esteem and builds confidence.
- Improve facial balance and aesthetics.
- Improve the ability for chewing, speech, and swallowing properly.
- Have adequate tongue space.
- Improve proper breathing for airway health.
- Prevent premature wear on teeth.
- Help with TMJ (jaw joint) issues as ortho could reduce or eliminate these issues.
- Help correct the effects of thumb or finger sucking.
- Help prevent tooth decay and gum disease, as straight teeth are easier to clean and maintain.

Most common reasons for orthodontics treatment

- Crowding or spacing:
 - Straightening teeth or closing spaces can resolve issues such as food impaction, speaking difficulties, and cosmetic concerns.
- Different irregular bite types:
 - Overbite: Upper teeth vertically overlap lower teeth; bottom teeth may be unseen when you bite down.
 - Underbite: Lower jaw is more forward than upper jaw; bottom teeth overlap top teeth.
 - Open bite: A space between your upper and lower front teeth when biting together.
 - Crossbite: One or more of the upper teeth fit inside the lower teeth.



- Overjet: The horizontal distance between the top and bottom teeth when the jaw is closed; the top teeth are too far in front of the bottom.
- Early orthodontic treatment can help guide the permanent teeth into their desired position.
- Breathing or swallowing problems, teeth grinding, jaw pain, poor speech and/or chewing ability, poor facial aesthetics.

TYPES OF ORTHODONTICS:

- **Metal or ceramic braces:**
Small brackets bonded to teeth that support wires held in place by tiny coloured elastics or metal threads; the wires apply gentle pressure to the teeth allowing the teeth to move. This technique is the most common.
- **Clear aligners:**
Made from a polyurethane resin plastic and replaced every 2-3 weeks with updated aligners that gradually move teeth to their desired position. These are removable to eat, clean, brush, and floss.
- **Other orthodontic appliances**
There are many other orthodontic appliances that help either before full treatment or in combination

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with full treatment, including separators, palatal expanders, space maintainers, head/neck gear, springs, facemask, elastics, biteplates, and more. Your dental professional will explain this to you if you require any of these devices.

TREATMENT PHASES

- **Assessment phase**

The first appointment usually requires an examination by the orthodontist/dentist, who develops an individualized, preliminary treatment plan and discusses it with the patient.

Assessment records are completed involving photos, x-rays, bite registration, and molds (impressions) or scans, and a treatment plan is created.

- **Active phase**

Braces or aligners are placed by the orthodontist, dentist, or dental hygienist. The patient returns for follow up adjustment appointments approximately every 3-8 weeks. Treatment lengths vary and can be several months to a few years. In cases where the jaw discrepancy is severe, jaw surgery may be included in the treatment plan.

- **Final phase**

This is the last phase of treatment, though not necessarily the last time you will see your orthodontist. Once your braces are removed or you no longer need your corrective aligners, you may be given a customized, fixed and/or removable retainer that you will be asked to wear, in most cases, for life. This will help to reduce shifting teeth and maintain the position the teeth are currently in. Your practitioner may continue to see you for yearly checkups to ensure your retainers are fitting correctly.



ORAL HYGIENE

This is even more important with orthodontic treatment as plaque and food build up easily around the appliance.

- **Brush** with a soft bristled or electric toothbrush at least twice per day making sure to angle the brush around brackets, bands, etc.
- **Flossing** is trickier, imperative and should be done once per day. Floss aids, such as an interdental brush, water flosser, and floss threaders, may help assist patients in their daily routine.
- A mouthrinse may also be recommended.
- Being neglectful in oral care can possibly lead to red swollen gums, bleeding, permanent white spot scarring on teeth, cavities, and can extend the length of orthodontic treatment.
- Continue to visit a dental hygienist for regular preventive treatment.

EATING

- Avoid eating foods that are hard, sticky, or chewy candy, nuts, caramels, gum, licorice, hard crusty breads, etc.
- Carrots, apples, and such, should be cut into small, bite sized pieces and eaten with care. Corn on the cob should be cut off the cob.
- Be mindful when you eat certain healthy foods, such as popcorn or fruits that contain seeds. They may require extra care to clean after enjoying them. You should be cautious and ensure proper cleaning to avoid any issues. Otherwise, they could damage your brackets and appliances, resulting in longer treatment time and added costs.
- When in doubt, don't eat it and ask your oral health professional for guidance.

Disclaimer: The ODHA is aware that from time to time, companies may offer orthodontic appliances online. ODHA encourages clients to do their due diligence to ensure the orthodontic appliance is being dispensed by a trained dental professional.

As professional health-care providers, dental hygienists are primarily concerned with promoting good oral health. Dental hygiene is among the largest of the regulated healthcare professions in the province. In Ontario all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and ongoing comprehensive oral care.

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