

Orthodontics

Years ago, corrective orthodontic appliances, known as braces, were used only for pre-teens and teens having problems with their bite. Today, according to recent statistics, close to 30 per cent of ortho clients are adults. Despite this growing trend toward adult orthodontics, it pays to start orthodontic treatment early for maximum effectiveness. Some dental professionals recommend that children receive an orthodontic evaluation by age seven.

THE PURPOSE OF ORTHODONTICS

Orthodontics is the science of bringing the teeth and jaws into proper alignment to improve appearance and function. It is a specialized branch of dentistry that deals with the diagnosis, prevention and correction of dental and facial irregularities occurring as a result of:

- A bad bite or malocclusion
- Missing or extra teeth
- Crooked or crowded teeth
- Protruding teeth
- An overbite or underbite
- Incorrect jaw position
- A disorder of the jaw joint
- Thumb sucking and open-mouth breathing

ADVANTAGES

- Repositions the teeth and underlying roots, providing better support for the crown of the tooth
- Rejuvenates facial balance by reshaping the jaw, neck and lips, which can be combined with surgical procedures
- Helps prevent tooth decay and gum disease, as straight teeth are easier to clean and maintain
- Prevents premature wearing of the back biting surfaces of the teeth
- Improves the ability to chew, speak and breathe properly
- Improves appearance with straight teeth
- Enhances self-esteem and builds confidence

WHAT CONSUMERS SHOULD KNOW

Braces are made from wires and springs attached to tiny metal plates or a plastic mould. Braces apply gentle pressure to the teeth and encourage them to move into a different position or alignment.

The best orthodontic results are achieved with children when their teeth and jaws are still growing. A child can be examined for braces as early as seven years old with treatment beginning between nine and 14 years of age. Braces are usually



worn for one to three years, depending on age, the type of procedure and how closely individuals follow the treatment plan. For adults, the process may take longer. Braces may be used in conjunction with surgery in severe cases.

Types of braces

There are several different types of braces. Some are metal or ceramic and are fixed to the teeth; others are removable and made of clear or transparent material, which are “invisible” on the teeth. The fixed braces are permanent fixtures and are removed at the end of the treatment period, whereas removable braces can be taken off only for eating, cleaning and playing sports.

The first phase

The orthodontist will examine the teeth that need to be aligned, take x-rays and impressions, and create an appropriate treatment plan. Braces are adjusted during the course of the treatment to achieve the desired effect. Many visits will be necessary in order to adjust the braces as needed, review treatment plan, and to fix or replace any loose or broken wires and bands. Dental hygienists work in collaboration with orthodontists to provide treatment.

The final phase

In most cases, following treatment individuals will be required to wear a retainer to hold teeth in their new position. This will ensure long-term results.

ORAL CARE AND MAINTENANCE

During treatment it is important to keep teeth and gums healthy. This means extra care when cleaning to remove plaque and food retained by the ortho appliances, which, if neglected, can lead to gum disease and cavities. Individuals with poor oral hygiene could experience slight to severe gum swelling and redness when the gum tissue enlarges enough to cover the fixed appliance. This contributes to plaque retention as well as an unpleasant appearance.

Home care

- Thorough brushing and flossing are important – brush twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste and a soft toothbrush; floss once a day with a floss threader
- Use a small end-tuft brush, a sulcus brush or a proxabrush around the brackets and wires
- A water irrigator will help to flush out debris from around brackets
- Avoid eating sticky and hard candies as well as chewing gum



- For removable appliances
 - clean after each meal and before bed
 - gently brush the exposed gum tissue
 - remove to eat, sleep and play sports
 - store them in a container with water when they are out of the mouth
- If teeth and gums are tender after an adjustment, eat soft foods for the first couple of days and rinse with salt and warm water
- As a temporary measure, place ortho wax on the bracket if lips or cheeks become irritated

Professional oral care

It is important to have regular checkups and professional cleanings to remove plaque and tartar. Dental hygienists will discuss specific concerns, develop individual home care treatment plans and recommend products that individuals can use to keep appliances and the mouth clean. They may also suggest a fluoride rinse or special products to help prevent calculus from developing into cavities.

As professional healthcare 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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