

## Orthodontics

### Braces...for me?

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Braces, or orthodontic treatment, can benefit both children and adults. And recent advances in esthetics have made braces less noticeable than in the past. Brackets, the part of the braces that holds the wires, are bonded to the front of the teeth and can be metal, clear or tooth-colored. Sometimes the brackets can be fastened to the back of the teeth. Newest in esthetic orthodontic treatment are “invisible” braces – clear, removable, molded plastic aligners that move your teeth into new positions.

#### How do I know if I need braces?

Your CDA member dentist will evaluate your occlusion (bite) and may recommend braces if your bite is not properly aligned (malocclusion). Malocclusion may result from crowded teeth, missing teeth, extra teeth, or jaws that are out of alignment. In children, malocclusions can be hereditary, or can be the result of accidents, thumb sucking, early loss of baby teeth or other forces that impact tooth position and jaw development. For adults, malocclusions often result from missing teeth or shifts that occur over time in the bite. Of course, an adult may have a malocclusion that was never corrected as a child and decide to correct it as an adult!

Children should be evaluated by a CDA dentist as their baby teeth are lost and their permanent teeth erupt. Often, early orthodontic intervention in a developing child can head off larger corrections that would need to be made later on in life as you get older.

#### How are orthodontic problems corrected?

The process that moves teeth is the same in everyone, child or adult. Steady pressure placed on the tooth puts pressure on the bone that holds the tooth, causing that bone to break down. Simultaneously, the tension created on the bone that is being “pulled” causes it to grow and fill in behind the moving tooth. Because bones in adults are no longer growing and forming, orthodontic procedures in adults may take a bit longer than in children, but the process is essentially the same for everyone. Once the “active” appliances that move teeth are removed, retainers must be worn so that teeth stay in place and the bone around them becomes stable. However, the mouth is a dynamic environment. With forces applied daily from chewing, swallowing, etc., teeth will naturally move over time and people should be aware that in order to keep teeth in the same place indefinitely and prevent future shifting or relapse, regular use of a retainer may be necessary.

Innovations in orthodontics make them esthetic and effective for children and adults alike. Your CDA member dentist will evaluate the benefits of orthodontics for you and advise you on your options. If you have been waiting for a straighter, more beautiful smile, or a more functional bite . . . wait no longer!