

### Early Orthodontic Treatment for Prevention

By Seth Newman D.D.S.

Close your eyes and picture someone wearing braces. If you're like most of us, you've envisioned an adolescent boy or girl with orthodontics being an integral part of those awkward preteen years. It's true that wearing braces has become somewhat of a rite of passage for our young people. However, as a parent it's important to know that not all orthodontic treatment occurs only during those preteen years. In fact, there are certain malocclusions ("bad bites") that are more appropriate to treat at an earlier age. Waiting until all the permanent teeth come in and facial and skeletal growth is complete, may make resolution of some problems more difficult.

The American Association of Orthodontics (AAO) recommends that all children receive an orthodontic screening by age seven. It's at this age that the permanent teeth begin growing into a child's mouth and that we, as orthodontists, can begin to diagnose and visualize orthodontic problems. It's an ideal time to determine what orthodontic treatment, if any, may be needed either now or in the future.

#### WHY EARLY CARE?

Early treatment, also known as interceptive orthodontics, typically occurs between the ages of seven and 10. Treatment is directed at taking advantage of a child's growth to provide sufficient room for the alignment of the adult teeth. This may make treatment at a later stage shorter and less complicated and can

prevent more serious problems from developing. It's important to understand that not all orthodontic problems can be treated at this age, nor should they be.

The most common reasons for early orthodontic treatment include the following:

■ **Protruding front teeth (buck teeth):** These forward positioned front teeth are at a greater risk of trauma, especially in active boys. Chipped, fractured or even broken teeth aren't uncommon in this population.

■ **Crossbites:** This occurs when the upper teeth are on



### Wisdom Tooth Myths



"My wisdom teeth have caused my teeth to shift!" It's a common misconception that the eruption of wisdom teeth can cause teeth to shift. These teeth usually come into the mouth at around 17 to 19 years of age. Wisdom teeth produce little, if any force on the surrounding teeth to cause meaningful change in tooth position. Jaw growth continues, albeit at a minimal rate until the early twenties. This process changes the dynamic between the facial skeletal and dental structures. These subtle

changes are often enough to result in some teeth shifting. It's also at this age that many of us go off to college and become lax in wearing retainers. Talk to your orthodontist about what you can do to prevent orthodontic relapse.

— Dr. Newman

the inside of the lower teeth and is apparent in several ways. In the front teeth only, on one side of the back teeth, on both sides of the back teeth, or in rare cases, in the front and back teeth together. This can lead to asymmetric and or improper growth of the

skeletal and facial structures. Crossbites can be treated with relative ease in young patients with immature bone structures. Treatment gets proportionately more difficult with age.

■ **Harmful oral habits:** Past age seven habits like thumb sucking, tongue thrusting and lip wedging can permanently influence the position of the adult teeth, causing them to erupt improperly.

■ **Jaw discrepancies:** Forward- or back-positioned lower jaws can be improved at an early age through growth modification appliances. This treatment can guide the upper and

## House Calls

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lower jaws into a more balanced relationship.

■ **Self-conscious feelings related to dental appearance:** Kids with low self-esteem related to dental appearance often show marked improvements with orthodontic treatment.

■ **Crowded teeth:** It's true that some level of mild crowding can be considered a normal stage of development during the transition into adult teeth. However, more profound crowding can lead to inadequate room for the eruption of the permanent teeth. Orthodontic treatment aimed at arch development can guide the permanent teeth into a more favorable relationship.

### **A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY**

Early orthodontic treatment traditionally involves only the adult permanent teeth present in the mouth. This orthodontic therapy utilizes many modalities, including palatal expanders, removable appliances and conventional fixed braces. The length of early treatment can range from as little as six to as much as 20 months. Costs are usually one-half to two-thirds the cost of comprehensive

orthodontic treatment.

Early treatment provides the orthodontist with a window of opportunity to significantly improve the dental development in those patients where treatment is indicated. It's possible that this therapy may reduce or eliminate the need for more invasive treatment later on, such as removal of teeth or jaw surgery. Most children do in fact need additional treatment after all the permanent teeth erupt. However, this treatment is usually simpler, more stable and for a shorter duration than if earlier treatment had not occurred.

When looking for an orthodontic specialist, ask your dentist for a referral. Another valuable resource is [www.braces.org](http://www.braces.org), which is sponsored by the American Association of Orthodontists. This site contains information about braces and a directory in which parents can find an orthodontist in their area. 🌐

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