

What is orthodontics?

Orthodontics is the branch of dentistry that focuses on diagnosing and treating “bad bites” (malocclusion) which can often include moving the teeth to improve your appearance. Common orthodontic treatments include braces, clear aligners, retainers, and space maintainers.

The way your teeth fit together has a significant impact on your oral health. By improving the way your upper and lower teeth meet, you can reduce your risk for a host of oral health issues, including cavities, gum disease, and excessive wear (erosion). Improving the appearance of your teeth with orthodontics can have a great impact on your self-esteem and self-confidence.

Who benefits from orthodontics?

Almost everyone can gain some benefit from orthodontics. But some people need treatment more than others. Many people seek orthodontic treatment because they want to improve the appearance of their smile. But in addition to cosmetic benefits, orthodontics offers improved chewing function and better oral health.

Common orthodontic problems

Types of orthodontic problems include:

- Overjet, when your upper teeth stick out over your lower teeth.
- Underbite, when your lower teeth stick out further than your upper teeth.
- Overlapping teeth.
- Crowded teeth.
- Crooked teeth.
- Rotated teeth.
- Impacted teeth (which are partially or fully trapped in your jawbone).

Who shouldn't have orthodontic treatment?

To qualify for orthodontic treatment, you shouldn't have any serious dental issues like extensive decay or gum disease. Placing braces on diseased teeth can have a serious negative impact on your oral health.

If you have cavities or gum disease, make sure to have that addressed first. Once you manage those conditions, most patients can enjoy the benefits of orthodontic treatment.

When you come to our office, Dr. Orr and Dr. Wilson will examine your overall health and help you determine if orthodontic treatment can help improve your smile.

What are examples of orthodontic treatment?

There are several types of orthodontic treatments that can improve your smile. Some of the most common include:

Braces

Braces gradually shift your teeth into their desired positions over time using a combination of brackets, bands and wires. There are different types of braces depending on your needs, including traditional metal braces and clear (ceramic) brackets. If you choose to have conventional braces, the metal or white ceramic brackets are bonded to your teeth, and you will visit the orthodontist on average once every 4-6 weeks to have the wires adjusted or changed. Over time, the teeth are guided into proper alignment. The amount of time required to straighten the teeth is very much dependent on how crooked or how far the teeth have to move, and you will be given an estimate of the treatment time when you start.

Clear aligners

Clear orthodontic aligners are a popular alternative to braces. Well-known brands include Invisalign® and ClearCorrect®. Rather than using brackets and wires to straighten your teeth, clear aligners use a series of custom-made, clear aligner trays. You wear each set of trays for one to two weeks before switching them out for the next set in the series. Over time, the clear aligners shift your teeth into their proper positions. [Click here](#) for a more in-depth description of clear aligners to find out if they are right for you.

Retainers

If you wear braces or clear aligners, you'll need a retainer once your orthodontic treatment ends. A retainer is a custom oral appliance that keeps your teeth from drifting out of their proper positions. A retainer can be used for minor movements of your teeth as well.

Palate expanders

Orthodontists recommend some treatments during childhood. This is because a child's facial bones are still developing and they're much easier to move and manipulate. A palate (palatal) expander helps to widen a child's upper jaw. Most children don't need palate expanders. But under the right circumstances, these devices can create extra space without the need for tooth extractions or other procedures.

Space maintainers

For children under the age of 12, a baby (deciduous) tooth holds the space for the permanent tooth forming below it. If the baby tooth is damaged and needs to be

removed or is otherwise lost prematurely, the space the baby tooth occupied MUST be kept open to allow the permanent tooth the space it needs to come into proper alignment. If that space is not held open, the teeth behind the space can drift forward, the space is lost, and the erupting permanent tooth has nowhere to go, resulting in crowding of teeth and the need for orthodontic treatment. Many times, orthodontic treatment can be avoided if the space is kept open by a space maintaining orthodontic appliance. Dr. Orr or Dr. Wilson can evaluate your child for the need for this type of appliance. Occasionally, this type of appliance can help an adult!

What are the advantages of orthodontics?

The cosmetic benefits of orthodontics are clear. But these treatments offer functional and health-related advantages as well:

- When your teeth are in proper alignment, they're much easier to clean.
- Straightening your teeth can improve chewing and speech function.
- Orthodontic treatment can ease pain related to TMJ disorder.
- An aligned bite can reduce your risk for cavities, gum disease and other oral health issues.
- Orthodontics can help you achieve and maintain a beautiful, healthy smile.

What are the disadvantages of orthodontics?

The main disadvantage is short-term: You'll have to follow treatment guidelines closely and be patient until you reach your goal. For some people, orthodontic treatment takes less than one year. For others, it can take up to two years or longer. Because every person has their own unique needs, treatment times look different for everyone. Ask Dr. Orr or Dr. Wilson what to expect.

If you don't clean thoroughly around your orthodontic appliances, you also have a greater risk of cavities or developing gum disease. Be sure to follow our oral hygiene recommendations.

How long will my results last after orthodontic treatment?

If you wear your retainer as directed, your results should last the rest of your life. However, if you stop wearing your retainer, your teeth could drift back into their old positions over time. We advise our patients to wear the retainers full time for the first six months after treatment ends, and they can reduce to night-time only wear thereafter and for the rest of their lives. Another way to put it is to wear the retainer until you get tired of having straight teeth!