

WHEN SHOULD MY CHILD SEE AN ORTHODONTIST?

In my practice as an orthodontist, people often tell me, "I'm bringing my child to see you as soon as all his baby teeth come out." My advice to them follows the recommendation of the American Association of Orthodontists, that every child should be seen by age 7. Most children will not need orthodontic treatment until their teenage years, but there are several problems that if caught and treated in a timely manner could prevent things from getting worse – in some cases, even avoiding the need for surgery. By correcting some of these problems early, the child's treatment time in braces during the teenage years can be shortened, thereby lessening the cost of treatment.

One problem that should be corrected early is a crossbite. This refers to a misalignment of the teeth in the way the upper and lower teeth fit together. Ideally, all upper teeth fit slightly over the lower teeth. Crossbite is when the opposite occurs and lower teeth fit in front of the uppers. This can cause abnormal appearance of the face, difficulty when eating and even speech difficulties. All of these symptoms can be corrected, and some even prevented by having treatment early. Another common type of crossbite requiring early intervention is one that occurs in the back teeth. Expansion of the upper palate may be needed in order to provide room for permanent teeth to erupt in their natural positions and to prevent the lower jaw from growing abnormally.

When seeking orthodontic treatment, a good rule of thumb when obtaining early treatment is to correct the problem in phase I (interceptive) treatment, then remove appliances and braces soon as possible. Most often, keeping braces on children during the interim between phase I and II treatment (when needed) is unnecessary, and can also lead to cavities that result from kids becoming lackadaisical in their oral hygiene habits. Seeing an orthodontist early is the most efficient way to maximize your dental care dollars, and ensure that your children get the best possible care.

- Carl K. Walker, D.M.D., M.S.

Carl K. Walker, D.M.D., M.S is a specialist in Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics. His primary office is located at 521 Montgomery Highway, Suite 125 in Vestavia Hills, with satellite offices on Acton Road & in Forestdale. For more information call (205) 823-1583.