



# Orthodontic Care for Your Child

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At Dino Kid's Dentistry, I often have parents ask about braces. When is the right time to see an orthodontist? Can braces be put on early to help with future issues? Can braces be delayed? Will braces hurt? Do braces make cavities worse?

Although the answer to those questions is specific to each child's age, dental findings, and specific concerns and goals of the parent and child, there are some general guidelines we rely on. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry has developed guidelines for screening patients for orthodontic care and for providing care or referring to an orthodontist when appropriate.

So, when is the best time for an orthodontic evaluation? The answer is... it depends!

Did you know that at every regular dental exam, I am looking for signs of developing orthodontic problems?

## For children under age 6, I evaluate:

- Are all baby teeth in or coming in?
- Is there enough space for teeth to come in properly?
- Have any baby teeth been lost or removed early? If so, I will look to see if a space maintainer is necessary to hold space for the adult tooth.
- Is there a habit such as a pacifier, thumb, or finger sucking? If so, I will look to see if there are any orthodontic problems resulting from the habit.

Although we may not do any treatment at this age, it is very helpful to anticipate problems and potential solutions; for instance, trying to stop a pacifier or thumb habit, or planning for braces when a child is older.

## For children who are starting to get adult teeth, or who have a mix of adult and baby teeth, I do a formal orthodontic screening.

- Are teeth coming in properly?
- Are there any airway issues?
- Are there any missing teeth or extra (supernumerary) teeth?
- Are there any problems with the relationship of the upper and lower jaws?
- Are there any problems with the way top and bottom teeth are hitting?
- Do front teeth have room to come in, or is there crowding?
- Does the child or parent have any concerns about the way teeth are coming in?

At this time, we can start considering if early orthodontic care is necessary. Early care may mean treatments such as: taking out baby teeth to allow permanent teeth to come in properly, placing a space maintainer to hold space for any baby teeth, or even a referral to an orthodontist. If airway issues are present, such as enlarged tonsils, a referral to a specialist may be necessary.

For adolescents who have no more baby teeth, if orthodontic problems are identified, it is a perfect time to see an orthodontist!

I have several orthodontists I work closely with who provide fantastic orthodontic care. The orthodontist will do an evaluation and determine if braces are a good option now or in the future, and then can discuss options with you and your child.



When a child is in braces, it is especially important to keep up to date with dental appointments. Cavities can start more easily when a child has braces, and brushing and flossing are very important. We are happy to help your child with learning to brush and floss around braces, and will work closely with the orthodontist if we identify any cavities or other problems. Many orthodontists require a child to have regular 6-month dental checkups during orthodontic treatment.

Give us a call today to schedule an exam for your baby, child, or adolescent, and we'll be happy to address any orthodontic concerns!

This article is for general information only and is not medical or dental advice. Please seek medical and dental care with you or your child's medical or dental provider for specific questions.