



Delta Dental of Washington

Braces or Aligners? How to Know What's Best for Your Child

SEATTLE – Aug. 1, 2024 – Some children hit the genetic lottery and don't need braces for their teeth, whereas many find themselves needing braces to help straighten their teeth into a healthy, beautiful smile.

[Studies show that nearly 70 percent of all children](#) in the United States report using orthodontics, which leaves many parents wondering about their options and whether braces make the most sense for their child.

"Early detection of alignment issues allows for timely intervention and more cost-effective treatment outcomes," said Kyle Dosch, DDS, Delta Dental of Washington's dental director and member dentist. "Braces play a crucial role in ensuring children develop healthy teeth and jaws, which can have long-lasting benefits for their oral health and overall well-being."

How do I know if my child needs braces?

Some people opt for braces strictly for cosmetic reasons, but for most they help prevent future bite or crowding issues which may occur as the face and jaw bones continue to grow. Braces can even help with speech impediments.

Dentists take all these issues into consideration, as well as looking at your teeth and gums to determine if braces might be right for your child.

Among the telltale signs that braces may be in your child's future are visibly crooked or crowded teeth, difficulty with brushing or flossing, bite problems which prevent teeth from closing together properly, clicking or popping noises in your jaw, or tooth spacing and gaps between your teeth.

Parents concerned about their child's smile should schedule an appointment with their dentist to discuss the options.

What types of braces are available?

The most common types of braces for children are traditional metal braces, ceramic braces and lingual braces. Technology has improved many things in our lives and braces are one of them. Today's braces are more streamlined, more comfortable and can be less visible than the ones many parents grew up wearing.

Traditional metal braces are made of brackets and heat-activated wire which move teeth more quickly and less painfully than in the past. These braces tend to be the least expensive type, but also the most noticeable.

Self-ligating braces are similar to traditional braces but use a built-in system to secure the wire to the brackets rather than elastic bands or metal ties. The main benefits to these types of braces are shorter orthodontist visits, easier cleaning and less discomfort. Some risks include bracket failure, which then requires longer orthodontist visits and longer treatment plans. Research does not show whether these types of braces work any better than traditional braces.

Ceramic braces are made of clear or enamel-colored brackets which are the same size and shape as traditional braces, but they are transparent and more discreet. On the flip side, they tend to be more expensive and can visibly stain if not properly cared for.

Lingual braces are the same as traditional metal braces, but they are placed on the back of the teeth reducing their visibility. They tend to be more expensive because of this and they are more difficult to clean.

[Aligners are a popular product for adults currently](#), though they are generally not recommended for children for a variety of reasons including the fact that they are removable, which can lead to kids losing them. Those with aligners, such as *Invisalign*, are also discouraged from drinking soft drinks, flavored water or sports drinks because liquid seeps into aligners and if they contain acid, sugar or both, it can rapidly lead to staining of the teeth and development of tooth decay.

Aligners are removable, which is generally seen as a positive for adults, as you can remove the appliances to eat or drink. For children, however, there can be drawbacks as aligners typically must be worn 22 hours a day. Being able to remove the aligners makes it easier for your child to lose or forget to wear them.

Aligners also aren't typically worn until all adult teeth are in place, which means children usually can't start wearing them until they are 12 or 13 years of age (depending on the child), whereas braces can be started in younger children.

How do braces work?

Braces work by applying pressure to your teeth over a period of time, encouraging your ligaments and bones around them to move in a specific direction. This process is known as remodeling and as your teeth move over time, your jaws gradually reshapes as well.

There may be some discomfort with orthodontic movement and remodeling, but it is temporary and your dentist or orthodontist can help mitigate this for your child.

How long do most kids have to wear braces?

Applying braces takes a couple hours as the orthodontist has to bond the brackets to each of your teeth, attach the arch wires and wrap a small rubber band around each bracket to help direct pressure on the teeth in a specific direction.

Generally, you then go to the orthodontist once a month for adjustments, checkups and tightening. If your child is experiencing pain, injury or irritation in their mouth, be sure and let the orthodontist know so they can work to mitigate the issues and make adjustments.

On average, young patients wear braces for one to three years. Once they are removed, patients generally wear retainers full time for a prescribed period of time and always at nighttime thereafter.

How much do braces cost?

Cost depends on many factors including whether your dental plan covers braces. Most dental insurance providers, like Delta Dental of Washington, offer [online tools](#) which can provide parents with an average price range based on where they live. [One recent generic study](#) shows costs ranging from \$3,000 to \$10,000 depending on the type of braces you choose. Many dental offices offer payment plans, so be sure and ask about those as needed.

For more information about oral health, visit Delta Dental of Washington's [blog](#).

About Delta Dental of Washington

Founded 70 years ago by Seattle area dentists who set out to revolutionize oral health care, an innovative program was developed to provide longshoremen's children access to dental care – and the concept of dental benefits was born. Today [Delta Dental of Washington](#), a not-for-profit, is the state's leading dental benefits provider covering nearly 4 million people statewide and beyond.

Through corporate philanthropy, oral health advocacy, and funding the [Arcora Foundation](#), Delta Dental of Washington plays a vital role in making dental care more equitable and accessible, increasing dental health education with an emphasis on youth, and expanding diversity at all levels within the dental profession. These collective efforts aim to improve oral health care in Washington so all people can enjoy good oral and overall health with no one left behind. Delta Dental of Washington is part of the Delta Dental Plans Association, consisting of 39 independent, affiliated member companies. For more information, visit: www.deltadentalwa.com.