

# Having braces fitted to correct your teeth

Orthodontics and Restorative Dentistry

Last reviewed: April 2026

Next review: April 2029

Information for Patients

Leaflet number: 1306 Version: 2

## What is orthodontic treatment?

In orthodontic treatment we help the teeth move using different braces. The treatment happens in 2 phases. The first is an active phase and the second is a holding (retention) phase. The success of treatment depends on you following the instructions the orthodontic team give you.

## The consultation

Before treatment starts we need to examine the teeth and jaws. We need to take record. These can be plaster models of the teeth, x-rays (radiographs) of the teeth and jaws, photographs and a medical/dental history. With this information the orthodontist can talk about the treatment plan with you (and your parents). In some cases we may recommend taking teeth out to get good results. This is different from person to person. We try to avoid it where possible.

### 1. The active phase

Average orthodontic treatment lasts between 1 to 4 years. This can be longer if:

- you do not look after the brace properly.
- you fail to come to appointments.
- the case is more complex.
- growth is slow.

Some cases need more than one type of brace to work. This can be more than one at the same time or one followed by the other. Most of the tooth straightening process take place between appointments, not at the adjustment appointments.

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When your brace is first fitted it may feel a bit uncomfortable. It often takes a few days to get used to it. If the teeth feel a bit uncomfortable then take a painkiller to help with the pain.

Appointments will vary. They tend to be arranged for every 8 weeks. We will check the braces at these appointments. We will make sure it is making the correct tooth movements. We will look to see if anything is broken and if you are keeping the teeth and brace clean.

## 2. The holding (retention) phase

Phase 2 starts after the active phase is finished. This is an important phase where you will wear a retainer to hold the teeth in their new position. This will help them to settle. Your teeth will often move if you do not wear your retainers. We often advise everyone to wear the retainers for as long as possible. This is often for life for 2 to 3 nights a week. We will give the first pair of retainers as part of treatment. If you need a replacement then you will have to see your own dentist and will be self funded.

### Your role

Your role is essential if treatment is to be successful.

You must:

- Keep your teeth and brace very clean.
- Avoid foods that could damage, break or dislodge the brace. This includes hard, chewy, sticky foods such as sweets, toffees, raw carrots, apples and chocolates.
- Regularly check your brace and teeth to make sure nothing is broken.
- Wear the braces, elastics, and retainers as explained by the orthodontic team.
- Keep all appointments. Phone early when you have to make a change to your appointment.
- Keep regular appointments with your own dentist to make sure oral health stays good during brace treatment.

### Possible risks and limitations of treatment

The time it takes for your treatment can be longer or shorter than expected. This is because there are a lot of factors that are out of control. Like with all treatments, there are some risks. The next pages explain these risks.

- **Poor oral hygiene**

Before treatment can start and during the treatment, your oral hygiene **must** be good. Poor cleaning can cause marks or holes on the fronts of the teeth around the brackets. These marks are permanent brown and white spots (decalcification). In some cases it may also result in gum disease. This is where the gums become red, puffy and bleed. This may cause permanent loss of the bone around the teeth and shrinkage of the gums (recession of the gums). Orthodontic treatment can cause recession of gums. If this is severe, then you can consider stopping treatment and accepting the recession. Or have a gum graft which you may need to pay for.

- **Tooth roots**

Tooth roots tend to shorten during treatment in all patients. This often affects only a few millimetres of the tips of the roots. This does not tend to affect the long term health of the teeth. Sometimes it may shorten quite a lot. It can be very difficult to predict when this happens. If we think you may have shorten roots then we will X-rays (radiographs) to check the root. If it is a problem then we may suggest you stop treatment. In extreme cases severe root loss could cause in the loss of the tooth. Teeth that have been hit or knocked (trauma) before the treatment can have more root shortening.

- **Loss of vitality inside of the tooth**

Sometimes a tooth or teeth may lose the nerve and blood supply to the inside of the tooth. This is called devitalised teeth. You may then need to have a root filling by your dentist. These teeth may also look discoloured. You can whiten them after age 18. This will cost you. If any tooth changes colour or causes pain you should tell your orthodontist. Teeth that have had trauma before the treatment can lose their vitality during treatment.

- **Pain and discomfort**

After your braces are first fitted and after each adjustment, the teeth will ache and be uncomfortable for a few days. This discomfort reduces during the course of the treatment. Taking painkillers like paracetamol just before or after the fitting or adjustment appointment will help to reduce this discomfort.

- **Crowns**

If your teeth have crowns or veneers it can sometimes break when the brace is removed. We take great care and try and avoid this from happening. But if it does happen then they would need to be replaced by your dentist after treatment. You would most likely need to pay for this.

- **Black triangles**

In adults if you have crowded teeth, it can cause your teeth to wear down unevenly. After treatment you may get small triangular gaps between the teeth. To remove or reduce these gaps we suggest a thin layer of enamel is removed between the teeth before the brace is removed. Or you can accept the gap or have a white filling added to reduce the size.

- **Small and missing teeth**

Some patients have some teeth that are a bit smaller than average. The dentist can add white filling or porcelain to make them bigger. In patients with missing teeth we may suggest that the gaps are filled by implants or bridges by their dentist after treatment.



## • Fractures of the teeth enamel

The hard outside part of your teeth is called enamel. We glue small metal squares of the brace (called the brackets) onto the enamel. This helps the teeth to move. When we remove these brackets, during treatment or at the end of treatment, very rarely a small part of the enamel can break away from the tooth surface. Your dentist can fix this.

## • Movement of teeth after the brace is removed

At the end of the active phase, teeth need to be held in place for a while to let them settle. You will need to wear a retainer brace. Teeth are a living structure. After treatment in most people the teeth can move a little throughout life, mainly the lower front teeth. If you want your teeth to stay straight throughout your life, you may need to wear retainers a few nights a week for life.

## • Jaw joint pain (temporomandibular dysfunction TMD)

It is common for patients to have pain in their jaw joints during or after treatment. The pain can be related to many factors like grinding, clenching during times of stress such as exams and for brace treatment. If this happens, you would need to let the dentist or the orthodontist know so that it can be managed. Normally it is managed with a soft diet and painkillers like paracetamol.

## Abandoned and discontinued treatment

If you do not take care of your oral hygiene or do not follow instructions, we will have to stop the treatment. We will remove the braces. Your teeth will not be left in the best position. You will have to pay for treatment if you want braces again.

Any dental treatment mentioned above will have to be carried out by your own dentist and the cost of the dental treatment will not be covered.

## Contact details

Department of Orthodontics: **0116 250 2648**

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