

Early Orthodontic Care

It's never too early to keep an eye on your child's oral development. Your pediatric dentist can identify malocclusion -- crowded or crooked teeth or bite problems -- and actively intervene to guide the teeth as they emerge in the mouth. Orthodontic treatment early can prevent more extensive treatment later.

Q: What causes crowded teeth and other orthodontic problems?

A: Malocclusion is often inherited. Orthodontic problems also are caused by dental injuries, the early loss of primary teeth or such habits as thumb sucking, fingernail biting, or lip biting. Your pediatric dentist can help your child avoid oral habits that may create orthodontic problems.

Q: Why is early orthodontic care important?

A: Early orthodontics can enhance your child's smile, but the benefits far surpass appearance. Pediatric orthodontics can straighten crooked teeth, guide erupting teeth into position, correct bite problems, even prevent the need for tooth extractions. Straight teeth are easier to keep clean and less susceptible to tooth decay and gum disease.

Q: What is early orthodontic treatment like?

A: Different orthodontic appliances work in different ways to benefit your child's dental health. Some are fixed; others are removable. Your pediatric dentist will explain which appliance is best for your child, what the treatment can do, and how long it will take.

Q: What care is recommended during orthodontic treatment?

A: As with any dental treatment, the more a child cooperates, the better the results. First, careful brushing and flossing keep the appliance and your child's health in top shape. (Removable appliances should be brushed each time the teeth are brushed.) Second, regular dental check-ups -- besides orthodontic appointments -- protect your child from tooth decay and gum disease. Third, prompt contact with your pediatric dentist when an appliance breaks will keep orthodontic treatment on-time and on-track.

Q: Can my child speak, eat, and play normally?

A: Your child can eat a normal diet except sticky foods (gum, caramels) and large, hard foods (peanuts, ice chips, popcorn). Some appliances alter speech, but most children adapt quickly and speak clearly within a day or two. Generally, children can safely run, jump, swim, and play with an orthodontic appliance. Check with your pediatric dentist for specific advice on your child's activities.