

SPECIAL REPORT

**DOES YOUR CHILD  
REALLY NEED  
BRACES?**



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## About This Special Report

Dear Friend,

If you are reading this report, it is because you have questions about whether or not your child really needs braces. First of all, Kudos to you for taking the first step in seeking more information and finding the answers to your questions. It is my hope this Special Report will assist you in gaining a better understanding of how orthodontic care and braces work in helping your child achieve not only a great looking smile, but a healthy one as well.

As an orthodontist, I get many questions from parents just like you who are not sure if their child needs braces or whether their child should see an orthodontist. In this Special Report, I address some of the most common concerns and questions I get from parents. Throughout the pages of this Special Report, you will know how soon we can tell if your child needs braces, what can go wrong at an early age, how many patients benefit from early treatment, why you should choose a specialist, and how to pay for braces in the event your child really needs them.

Please feel free to contact my office with any questions or to schedule an exam for your child.

Sincerely,

David Muench, DDS

## How soon can we tell if your child needs braces?

Many parents want to know just how early we can tell if a child needs braces. That's a fair question, and one that should not go unanswered. You need to feel comfortable and confident with the information you are receiving regarding whether or not your child needs braces.

According to the American Association of Orthodontics, all children should have their first orthodontic check-up by age 7. I second that notion, and find that the age of 7 is the perfect age for an orthodontic visit. This is an important step in helping to ensure your child's teeth are off to a great start and that they will have a healthy and attractive smile that will last a lifetime.

By taking your child to the orthodontist by the age of 7, we are able to see problems you are likely unaware even exist. By this age, children's teeth have developed to the point where we can see even small problems that may be associated with such things as emerging teeth or jaw growth. For most 7 year olds, their first visit to the orthodontist is nothing more than an exam. However, there are a small number of children, around 5 to 10 percent, who can benefit from what we refer to as "interceptive orthodontics." There are potentially dangerous problems we may find and can address, including:

- Jaw alignment problems
- Impacted teeth
- Chipped or fractured teeth
- Gum recession



By addressing the problems listed above, we also help to alleviate social issues, where children may be the victim of teasing or bullying simply because of their appearance. A child's teeth and smile can have a major

impact on their wellbeing as they grow. With a beautiful smile, they are more likely to be confident and social, as well as gain a host of other health benefits.

## What can go wrong at an early age?

As a parent, you may believe you can look at your child and see if there is a problem with their bite. Sometimes that can happen, but there is a lot that cannot be seen, especially to the untrained eye. And it is these hidden issues that make it important for a child to see an orthodontist for an exam.

Here are some of the possible problems that can go wrong at an early age:

- Thumb-sucking
- Difficulty with chewing or breathing
- Loosing baby teeth too early or too late
- Having teeth that are crowded, loose, or blocked-out
- Upper and lower teeth that do not meet properly
- Improper jaw alignment
- Impacted teeth
- Tongue thrusting
- Severe crowding, with stripping of the teeth through the gum tissue
- Cross bites



As you can see, there is actually a lot that go wrong, even at an early age. The best way to provide yourself, and your child, with a great smile and peace of mind is to opt for an exam with an orthodontist by age 7. Most of the time, children don't start getting necessary treatment until the age of 9, but it's important to catch problems early so they can be corrected and won't lead to additional problems as time goes by.

Taking your child to the orthodontist by the age of 7 gives you the best head start on identifying and addressing any problems so your child can have a healthy beautiful smile!

## How many patients benefit from early treatment?

At this point, you may be thinking all children will need to have early orthodontic treatment. Relax, that's simply not the case, so don't spend your time worrying about the "what if's" associated with helping your



*"It doesn't hurt when she chews any more,  
and that makes us both very happy."*

— Jennifer, 33

child to get, and keep, a healthy beautiful smile. In our orthodontic experience, we have examined many children and found that the number of them needing early treatment is quite low. In fact, out of the roughly 7,000 orthodontic patients we have

seen, only 5 to 10 percent of them have required early treatment.

Keep in mind that while less than 10 percent of children we see need early treatment, this number can vary, as it is influenced by a variety of factors. Such things as geographic location and ethnicity, for example, can sometimes play a role and lead to a higher or lower number of children who benefit from early orthodontic treatment.

Generally speaking, most children do not need early orthodontic treatment, but unless your child is screened, you won't know if you fall into that 10 percent who do, or the 90 percent who don't. The key factor is early detection, making it essential children have their first visit with an orthodontic specialist by the time they are 7 years old.

Like most other health issues that can arise, being able to detect them early is the best way to address them. The only way you can detect them early is with an orthodontic examination. If your child has not yet seen the orthodontist, now is the time!

## Why choose a specialist?

Many people wonder why they should take their child to see a specialist, rather than just visiting with their regular dentist. While your family dentist is an important part of taking excellent care of your child's teeth, it is simply not enough. Seeing a specialist is crucial to ensuring that nothing is overlooked and that the best possible treatments are effectively selected and carried out.

To understand why a specialist is recommended, it is important to know what an orthodontist is and what they do. An orthodontist is someone who is a dental specialist. They have completed an additional 2 to 3 years of education beyond dental school. Their area of specialty and what they have intensely studied is learning all about the proper way to align teeth and jaws. Through the additional training an orthodontist receives, they are able to identify irregularities in tooth alignment or development, diagnose jaw growth problems, and treat these conditions through a variety of methods. More specifically, an orthodontist, because they are a specialist, is able to identify, diagnose, and treat such conditions as:

- Difficulty with chewing, biting, or teeth that abnormally meet
- Grinding and clenching teeth
- Early or late loss of baby teeth
- Crowding, misplaced, or blocked-out teeth
- Speech difficulties
- Biting into the roof of the mouth or the cheek
- Teeth that protrude
- Facial imbalances

Throughout the health community, you will find that there are



specialists. The dental field is no different. Orthodontists are specialists who are able to take a more in-depth approach at diagnosing and treating any dental issues your child may have.

## What if my child really doesn't need braces?

Perhaps your child has experienced some of the conditions already mentioned. Or, maybe you noticed some things yourself that made you think your child may need braces, but you took your child to the orthodontist only to find out they don't need them right now. So, where does this type of scenario leave you? Quite simply, it means you should work with an orthodontist to monitor your child's teeth! Treatment might be indicated later in life if the orthodontist detects any problems in future jaw growth or your child might simply be a candidate for retainers to maintain a healthy smile.



An orthodontist will always recommend seeing your child periodically to monitor jaw growth and dental development. Doing so will provide important information and allow early detection of possible future developmental problems such as abnormal tooth eruption or jaw growth imbalances. Continuing regular orthodontic check-ups is also part of a healthy lifestyle.

Ideally, your child should continue to have an exam with the orthodontist every 6 - 12 months to allow for close observation of growth during the time baby teeth are shedding, permanent teeth are erupting, and the jaws are growing. The best practice, when it comes to putting braces on a child's teeth, is to do it at the "ideal time." The only way to pinpoint the ideal time is to conduct regular exams. Most orthodontists will provide complimentary exams, so you don't need to worry about incurring an orthodontic bill every 6 - 12 months.

It's always in the best interest of your child to put braces on at the "ideal time" as it reduces the overall length of treatment. This is an important benefit because less treatment time helps to reduce the risk for cavities, gum problems, and sore teeth, all of which are common when braces are left on too long.

## How do I pay for my child's braces?

How to pay for braces is one of the most common questions I get from parents. This is an understandable concern. We realize many families do not have dental insurance that will help with orthodontic costs. Even those who have dental insurance may find it covers only a portion of their child's total orthodontic expenses. However, having braces is such an important issue, if it is recommended by your orthodontist your child have them, you should do everything possible to obtain them.

Getting braces is more than just an esthetic issue, although that is also important. If your child has teeth that are crowded or misaligned, it can lead to issues with everything from not being able to clean them properly to speech problems, making it essential they receive the orthodontic treatment that is recommended for their condition.

Orthodontic procedures, like most other medical procedures, may cost several thousands of dollars because of all the work involved. If your child needs braces, it can cost anywhere from \$5,000 - \$10,000. The good news is there are options for those who do not have the funds readily available to pay for orthodontic correction.

Here are a few payment options to consider:

- **Flex Spending/Health Savings Accounts:** Many people are able to afford braces and other orthodontic treatments through the help of Flex Spending Accounts (FSA's) or Health Savings Accounts (HSA's). These accounts are set up through your place of employment and allow you to set aside dollars, pre-tax, which can be used for medical or dental expenses. Because you never know when you may need this financial assistance, it's a good idea to investigate FSA/HSA accounts now. That way, when you need it, the funds will be there. Also, since these accounts allow you to deduct money from your gross earnings, it

reduces your taxable income, which reduces your income taxes, which helps to offset the cost of orthodontic treatment.

- **Financing.** Third-party financing for orthodontic treatment may also be a good option, depending upon your circumstances. Sometimes a loan from family or friends is possible. Other times, you may be able to qualify for a low interest loan through your financial institution to help with your child's orthodontic expenses, thereby allowing you to spread the payments over a comfortable period of time.

## How do I pay for my child's braces? *(continued)*

- **Payment Plans.** Speak with your orthodontist, as most offer some type of payment plan that will allow you to make monthly payments for treatment services. This is usually a service provided that is free of interest, and they are flexible in working with you to ensure you have a comfortable payment amount each month.

Paying for your child's orthodontic treatment may be a concern, but you shouldn't let it discourage you. Payment options are there to help you so you can in turn help your child. When you help your child get braces or other orthodontic treatment they really need, you will be helping them more than you could possibly realize.

As a child, I needed braces. While my parents struggled to pay for my braces, and although they may have realized they were just fixing my teeth, they were actually giving me so much more than a great smile. In all honesty, I would pay multiples of what my parents paid in order to give my children the same benefits I experienced from having braces. My parents paying for me to have braces turned out to be life changing.



Not only did getting braces as a child help me to be more confident, outgoing, and more socially accepted, it also made me realize just how important something like a smile is in the bigger picture. It made such an impact on me

that I made it my career choice because I wanted to help give that life changing experience to other children.

Braces may not seem life changing when you are not the one needing them, but I can assure you for those who need them, it's an incredibly satisfying feeling they get when treatment has been completed, and they can look in the mirror and love their smile. And that's just the esthetic benefits. There are many health related benefits as well, especially for those who choose to work with an orthodontic specialist to address their child's orthodontic problems early on.

When choosing an orthodontist to work with, opt for one that has plenty of experience, has worked with many children, and one that your child feels comfortable with. Depending on the treatment needed, your child may see an orthodontist regularly for several years.

I hope that you have found this Special Report helpful in answering some of your questions regarding whether or not your child needs braces. While I can provide some answers here to the most common questions, the best way for me to determine if your child needs braces is to schedule a complimentary exam.

We are ready when you are, so please call my office today to set up an appointment for your child's initial exam. We have helped many other children, and by seeing your child by the time they are 7 years old, we can help ensure dental health that will give them a healthy and beautiful smile for a lifetime!

## About the author:

Dr. Muench earned his Bachelor of Science, with Honors in Biology, from Ursinus College, and a Doctor of Dental Surgery from SUNY at Stony Brook. He completed an Advanced Training Program in General Dentistry at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine where he gained extensive experience in maxillofacial trauma. After practicing general dentistry briefly, he pursued specialty training in Orthodontics at The University of Rochester Eastman Department of Dentistry where he became a Certified Orthodontic Specialist.

A strong interest in children born with birth defects led him to a Craniofacial Orthodontic Fellowship at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center where he received training in the management of complex facial

deformities under the guidance of world-renowned surgeons. Following that, he completed an additional two years of advanced specialty training in Pediatric Dentistry at Baylor College of Dentistry where he became a certified Pediatric Dental Specialist.

Dr. Muench is a former full-time Assistant Professor of Orthodontics and Pediatric Dentistry at The University of Rochester Eastman Department of Dentistry. He was the director of the Dentofacial Deformities Clinic and co-director of the Cleft Palate-Craniofacial Dysmorphology Clinic.

Dr. Muench is a member of many professional organizations including: American Association of Orthodontists; Northeast Society of Orthodontists; New York State Society of Orthodontists ; American Dental Association; New York State Dental Association; Sixth District Dental Society; Broome County Dental Society; and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.

Dr. Muench is past-president of the Upstate New York Damon Orthodontic Study Club, and has lectured at numerous dental society meetings, universities, and dental study clubs, and is the co-author of several scientific research papers. He is currently serving as a board member and Secretary-Treasurer for the New York State Society of Orthodontists, and Treasurer for the Broome County Dental Society.

Dr. Muench maintained a dual-specialty practice where he provided both Orthodontics and Pediatric Dentistry in Pennsylvania and New York. His Pennsylvania practice was located in a dental health shortage area where he provided pediatric, orthodontic, and adult dental care for the poor and underprivileged under a contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

Dr. Muench has had practices in Texas, Pennsylvania, and New York.

As a Board Certified Orthodontic Specialist, Dr. Muench has completed several important additional steps beyond his basic dental school education. First, he had to successfully complete a two-year full-time orthodontic residency. Second, he had to complete a written examination in all areas of Orthodontics. Lastly, he had to demonstrate proof of his skills in Orthodontic diagnosis and treatment planning based upon actual treated patients. Orthodontists are only allowed to apply for Board Certification after practicing for at least five years. As a member of the

National Board of Orthodontics, Dr. Muench has achieved a high level of certification and peer recognition within the specialty of Orthodontics.

Dr. Muench is passionate about orthodontics and feels privileged to be able to use his skills in service to the many wonderful families in Vestal and the surrounding areas.