



Tips for Finding

GREAT ORTHO CARE



One of the things that most parents want for their children is to be happy and healthy. Part of that is making sure that their oral care is taken care of, whether they were blessed with perfectly straight teeth or they need a little extra help to get there. While there are orthodontists around the country, it is important that you get teamed up with one that is going to make your family's experience a pleasant one. The good news is that doing just that is not as difficult a task as it may seem. Every family can find great orthodontic care if they know what to expect and look for.



Who Should I See for Orthodontic Care?

Most people who find themselves in the position of needing an orthodontist don't give much thought to who they should see and why. They may go online and pick the first one that pops up in their Google search, or they may go with one down the road from their office, simply because they have passed by the building for years while on their way to work. While you may get lucky and end up with results you are happy with, there are better ways to go about picking an orthodontist.

A common question parents have is whether or not they can see a dentist for their child's orthodontic needs. It is important for parents to understand that there are some important differences between dentists and orthodontists, and a dentist should not be seen in place of an orthodontist. An orthodontist is someone who has two to three years of education beyond dental school, and they are a specialist at straightening teeth and aligning the jaws. On the other hand, a dentist has several fewer years of education and specializes in cleaning teeth and fixing cavities.

If your child needs their teeth or jaw aligned, the best possible person to help is going to be an orthodontist. Ensuring you are dealing with a specialist for such an important treatment is crucial to making sure that you and your child are happy with both the procedure and the outcome. Orthodontists play an important role in helping people have a beautiful smile—with their teeth and jaws aligned—so that they love what they see when they look in their mirror, stand before a group to speak, or want to fit in with their peers.

Questions to Ask to Help Choose the Right Orthodontist

- Are you a board certified orthodontist?
- What hours is the office open?
- What are the treatment options and what is your post-treatment follow-up process?
- Will you personally be doing all of the work, or is it done by someone else in the office? If someone else does, what are their credentials for assisting with treatment?
- What is the proposed treatment plan and what type of consequences could there be if treatment were to be delayed or put off until later?
- Does your office specialize in orthodontic treatment, or do you also provide such treatments as filling cavities, root canals, and tooth extractions?
- What are the costs involved for treatment, what type of finance options do you offer, and what insurance plans do you accept?

Good Care Matters

Good orthodontic care will ensure that your child grows up to be happy with their teeth and smile. The American Association of Orthodontics (AAO) reports that one-third of American adults are unhappy with their smile. The goal of every parent who is seeking orthodontic care for their family is to help ensure that when their children grow up, they are *not* part of the one-third who don't like the way their teeth look. Not having a smile you are proud of can have some negative consequences both while growing up and throughout adulthood.

The AAO recommends that children see an orthodontist for a checkup by the age of seven. This gives parents a jump start on being able to determine if their child will need treatment to ensure their teeth are straight and their jaws are aligned. Whether your child is already past the age of seven or not, it's never too late to get started with an orthodontic checkup. Many parents can see there are issues that need to be addressed, while others may hear about it from their child's dentist. Either way, choosing quality care is important right from the start.

If your child needs braces, which is a common orthodontic treatment, it is a commitment. The commitment to have braces can take a couple of years to complete. If you are teamed up with an orthodontist whom you don't care for or whom you feel is not providing quality services, that is a long time to continue seeing someone on a regular basis. Even once the braces are on the teeth, there are appointments that take place every 4-8 weeks, depending on the treatment. Typically, the average visit can last 15-45 minutes each.

No matter how you look at it, you will be investing a lot of time in orthodontic visits throughout treatment. That alone makes it an important reason to ensure you are getting great orthodontic care. No matter how you look at it, seeing an orthodontist is a real investment. You are investing a lot of time to help ensure your child has a great smile. If all goes well, that investment will pay off for the rest of your child's life; it will help them socially, give them more confidence, and allow them to love the way their smile looks as an adult. It's an investment that deserves a great return, and that can only happen by choosing someone who is going to provide great care.



Finding the Right One

When your family teams up with an orthodontist, you want to make sure that you feel you are a part of a team. Some of the things you want to look for in great orthodontic care include:

- **They care about you and your child.** The last thing you want is to just be another number or face that they don't remember, or where the staff is in a hurry to get you in and out of the office. You want to feel that they value and appreciate having your family there and that your child's treatment is important.
- **They are accessible when you need them.** It may be easy for an office to say they are going to work only Monday through Friday up until 5 p.m., but that may not be very convenient for you as a patient. What happens if your child needs a later appointment due to your job, or if there is a problem with their braces that happens to creep up on a Saturday afternoon? Part of getting great orthodontic treatment is that you are able to be seen and heard when you need to be. That doesn't mean the doctor should be available at your every whim, of course, but there needs to be some flexibility there. The orthodontist should understand the needs of busy families who may at times need an appointment in the off hours, or who have questions after hours.
- **They are forthcoming in answering your questions to give you all of the information you need.** In order for you to make decisions and feel like an active part of the treatment, you need to know and understand what is going on. A great orthodontist never leaves you hanging with questions or uncertainty. You should always feel comfortable with what is going on, have an understanding of why things are being done the way they are, and feel as though all of your questions are answered. The ques-

5 Must-Haves for Great Orthodontic Care

1. Someone who cares about you and your child and doesn't see you as just another number or patient. They see you as an individual, see your situation as uniquely yours, and care about successfully helping you with your treatment needs.
2. Their office is accessible when you need them. Whether you need flexible appointment times or have questions that need to be answered on the weekend, they have those bases covered and are there for you.
3. The office is forthcoming and open with all information, ensuring your questions are answered, and that you always feel well informed. Great orthodontic care should never be a guessing game. You should always know what's going on, why it's happening, and what is involved.
4. The doctor takes the time to make a connection with your child. While parents may do most of the treatment talk, kids are a huge part of the process and should not be overlooked.
5. Someone who your family feels comfortable with right from the start.

tions you have should always be welcomed and addressed. If you have an orthodontist who seems too busy to answer you or you feel is too brief to actually provide you with the answers you are seeking, that could be a red flag.

- **They pay attention to your child, and not just you.** While parents may do a lot of the talking and making of decisions, it is the kids who are getting the treatment. It's important that the doctor make a connection with your child, helping them feel

comfortable and heard. If they have concerns, they should feel comfortable expressing those concerns to the doctor, and the doctor should take the time to speak to them at their level, help them feel more comfortable, and show them they are valued as a patient.

- **They are open and honest with you about the treatment options.** You should be able to easily obtain information about such things as braces, clear aligners, retainers, and much more. Along with the information and recommendations on these things, you should also be able to easily obtain infor-

mation about what the treatment will cost and the types of finance options that are available to your family.

Remember, you are investing a lot of time into taking your child to an orthodontist for treatment. And there is a lot that hangs in balance. It is crucial that you get great care to ensure that your investment pays off. When you have the right orthodontist by your side, it should feel like a partnership. You are both working together to help ensure that your child has their orthodontic needs met in a satisfactory manner, with both of you doing your part.

Start at the Right Time

A generation ago, people typically got their braces as teenagers. Things have come a long way in the field of orthodontics. Today, it is recommended that children see the orthodontist earlier so that if they need treatment, it can take place while their teeth are still in the growing stages. Referred to as interceptive orthodontics, the practice of treating children's teeth at a younger age is becoming more popular. When they are younger, they tend to be more compliant with the treatment, they usually need fewer tooth extractions, and there tends to be even better results.

While some parents may be able to tell their child needs orthodontic care, it may not be so clear for others. There are some signs that parents should look for that could be an indication that they should see an orthodontist. These signs include the following:

- Losing baby teeth too early or late
- Having difficulty with biting and chewing
- Breathing most of the time through their mouth, rather than through their nose
- Having a thumb-sucking habit, which can cause teeth to become crooked
- Teeth are missing, crowded, or blocked out
- Jaws are not in alignment, being either too far forward or back
- Teeth are protruding or overlapping
- Upper or lower teeth do not align correctly when closing the mouth
- Having a habit of grinding or clenching their teeth



Issues such as these can often be addressed with great orthodontic care, and sometimes they can even be symptoms of a larger, more pressing issue. Having them checked out from an early age can help address any problems that may be present, as well as help avoid other issues that can result later on from the problem.

When researching an orthodontist for your family, it is important to make sure that you verify they are board certified. Always choose an orthodontist for treatment that falls within their specialty, rather than going to a dentist who may suggest they can provide the treatment. It's an investment that is far too great to put into anyone's hands except for a specialist.

When you have an orthodontist in mind whom you are considering, set up a consultation with them. When you go into the office, pay attention to how you and your children are treated. From the greeting you get at the front desk through the appointment with the doctor,

you should feel welcome and comfortable. Be sure to ask questions at that initial meeting so you know if this is the orthodontist you want to spend a couple of years seeing as your child gets treatment. It's also a good idea to see if there are reviews of the orthodontist office online, and check with the Better Business Bureau to learn more about the reputation the office has.

Getting treatment is an investment in your family's future that will pay off well with a beautiful smile and confident children who grow into confident adults ready to take on the world. Choosing the right orthodontist is going to make a world of difference when it comes to getting great orthodontic care. By being well informed, you will be one giant step closer to teaming up with the right doctor. With a little homework, evaluation, and care, you will find an orthodontist who makes a great fit for your family, and who will provide them with excellent care.



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