

FAQ's for teenagers

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. When should I have my first appointment?

Most children begin treatment around the age of 12 or 13, once all their permanent teeth have erupted. In a few instances treatment is better started early and your dentist may want to make an earlier referral. But age is not a barrier to treatment and the number of adults seeking treatment is on the increase.

Q. Who provides Orthodontics?

Most treatment in the UK carried out by specialist orthodontists working in local practices. Specialist orthodontists are dentists who have done an additional three years of specialist training. They usually see their patients on referral from a general dentist. There are also dentists with a special interest in orthodontics who have trained to treat the more straightforward orthodontic cases. The very complex cases, often requiring surgery, are referred to a Consultant Orthodontist in hospital. Orthodontists in the Community Dental Service also provide a supporting service mostly to the staff in their clinics and treat patients with special needs.

Q. How is treatment paid for?

Within the NHS, orthodontic care for children under 18 can be provided free if the need for treatment is great enough. Minor problems are excluded however. It is not always easy to find an NHS orthodontist in some areas particularly since limitations have been placed on availability of NHS funding and increasingly patients are opting for private treatment. Private treatment can offer a wider choice of braces, including clear brackets or invisible braces, and more convenient appointment times. Costs for private treatment vary according to the part of the country but are likely to be in the range of £1800 to £4,500, depending on the locality, the age of the patient and the extent of treatment required.

Q. What happens at my first visit?

The orthodontist will examine your mouth to assess the problem. You may well have X-rays and/or photographs taken. Impressions or "moulds" of your teeth will also be needed before treatment starts. The orthodontist will then want to discuss the possibilities for treatment with you and agree how to proceed. It is very unlikely that you would have braces fitted at the first appointment.

Q. Will I need extractions?

Correcting the teeth often needs additional space. Extractions may well be needed if sufficient space cannot satisfactorily be created in other ways. This decision is taken as part of the orthodontic assessment. The extractions are normally carried out by your own dentist rather than the orthodontist.

Advances in treatment methods mean that extractions are actually needed less frequently than in the past

Q. How often will I need an appointment?

You will usually need to have appointments every four to six weeks. It is not advisable to start treatment if you know you will not be able to keep regular appointments.

Q. Can I have "colours"?

The "colours" are tiny elastic rings which are mostly used to hold the wires into the brackets on your teeth. They are readily available in many different colours so you can personalise your brace. Most orthodontists are happy to offer the colour of your choice. You should be aware however that certain types of bracket are not designed for use with elastic rings and colours are not an option in such cases. Your orthodontist can advise you.

Q. Will treatment be painful?

Fitting a brace is not painful, at the most a little discomfort is involved. However for a few days afterwards the teeth and gums will almost certainly ache as the teeth start to move. This is to be expected and is not a cause for concern. Your cheeks can also get sore until they are used to the brace.

There may also be some aching after the brace is adjusted from time to time.

If necessary take your usual painkillers until things settle down.

Q. What is headgear and why is it recommended?

Headgear may be recommended to move your back teeth in order to create more space at the front of your mouth. The headgear fits round the back of your head or neck and is attached to the brace. It is usually worn during the evening and overnight. At first your teeth may feel tender when you wake up but this is a good sign because it means that your teeth are moving. The tenderness should soon wear off.

Q. Should I have check-ups with my own dentist during orthodontic treatment?

Yes definitely; the orthodontist only looks after the braces. Your teeth are actually at greater risk during orthodontic treatment and it is particularly important that you keep up regular contact with your own dentist.

Q. I think we may be moving away soon. Is it best to get started before we go?

Probably not. Changing orthodontists is best avoided if possible as orthodontists work in different ways with different appliances and a transfer will almost inevitably mean a setback in the progress of your treatment. Nevertheless there are times when a transfer cannot be avoided and your orthodontist should be able to find someone to take over your treatment at your new location. The NHS makes full provision for a transfer of treatment these days.

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