

## Key points

- Most orthodontic appointments are likely to be during school hours and take place every six to eight weeks over approximately 18-24 months
- At the beginning of orthodontic treatment, a young person may have tender or sore gums and jaw ache
- Undergoing orthodontics can affect speech
- If a brace is damaged, an urgent appointment will be necessary
- A mouthguard is strongly advised when playing contact sports
- Young people can feel self-conscious about wearing braces - teachers can help by being discreetly supportive and alert to bullying

## Further information

A range of leaflets can be found on the website of the British Orthodontic Society:

[www.bos.org.uk](http://www.bos.org.uk)

On the same site you will also find advice for musicians having orthodontic treatment:

[www.bos.org.uk/Information-for-Schools/Advice-for-Musicians](http://www.bos.org.uk/Information-for-Schools/Advice-for-Musicians)

General information can be found on the website of the Oral Health Foundation:

[www.dentalhealth.org](http://www.dentalhealth.org)



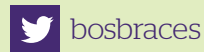
# A guide to orthodontics for those working with the under 18s

### British Orthodontic Society

12 Bridewell Place,  
London, EC4V 6AP

Tel: 020 7353 8680

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The British Orthodontic Society Guide

# A guide to orthodontics

## for those working with the under 18s

Orthodontics is a dental treatment which involves wearing braces (fixed and removable).

The benefits of orthodontic treatment can include the following:

- **Straightening of teeth**
- **Correction of the bite so that the front and back teeth meet together evenly**
- **Reducing the risk of damage to prominent teeth**
- **Improving the appearance, including the smile**

The value of an even and attractive smile is widely recognised nowadays, making orthodontics a popular dental treatment.

This leaflet is designed to support those working with young people by explaining some aspects of tooth-straightening.



A significant proportion of young people have irregularities and developmental problems with their teeth and jaws. Left unchecked, these problems may affect the health of the teeth in the long-term and, in some circumstances, can affect a young person's ability to eat comfortably or speak properly. Young people are commonly teased about the appearance of their teeth and low self-esteem is a common finding in these situations.

Orthodontic treatment aims to correct such problems by establishing a healthy, even bite and improving the appearance of the teeth, mouth and face. Many young people who have undergone orthodontic treatment report higher levels of self-esteem and their quality of life is often significantly improved.

It's available as a free NHS treatment for under 18s who meet strict criteria based on need, applying to approximately one third of young people in the UK.

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## Types of braces

Orthodontic braces, also known as appliances, can be fixed or removable. There is also a 'functional' type of appliance which in a growing young person helps correct sticking out front teeth and this is worn before the fixed metal braces phase.

## What age is best for treatment?

Most young people start treatment around the age of 11-12, at the point when most of their adult teeth are coming through. Orthodontic treatment can harness growth to make treatment as effective as possible. Patients are usually referred between the ages of 10 and 14.

## Early treatment?

Sometimes it can be worth seeking an opinion at an earlier age. If the young person has a prominent upper or lower jaw, orthodontic treatment can help prevent accidents to the front teeth. Occasionally, early (interceptive) treatment at this stage can reduce the complexity of later treatment.



## Starting orthodontics

The early days of treatment aren't easy as the patient gets used to having braces in their mouth. It's important to be understanding. Sometimes the teeth and jaws can ache or the patient may suffer from tender or sore gums. Wax can help if a metal brace is rubbing while painkillers can help deal with the discomfort. Kits to help patients with their braces are usually available.

Some braces, in particular the removable type of brace, can affect speech. This may impact on the young person's ability to speak clearly in class. If the appliance is worn full-time, speech will adapt in a short period of time.

A young person can feel self-conscious about wearing an appliance, at least in the early stages. It is helpful if teachers can be discreetly supportive, particularly if the young person becomes shy or withdrawn. Teachers can help by being alert to teasing or bullying that may be directed at the young person as a result of the braces.

## Losing braces

Where a removable brace is prescribed, patients often wrap it up in paper while they eat. Unfortunately, this means that every now and then, a brace may be lost. Our recommendation is that when a brace is not in the mouth, it's placed safely in a small box. This is less likely to get swept up and lost.



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## Damage to braces

If a brace breaks or is damaged, this will need fixing as quickly as possible so as not to affect the treatment adversely. We strongly recommend that DIY orthodontics isn't attempted! An urgent appointment will be necessary and often this will fall within school hours.

## Accidents and sport

Mouthguards are strongly advised for orthodontic patients playing sports, especially contact sports such as boxing, hockey, rugby, netball, cricket or football. Dentists will be happy to make and supply a mouthguard to fit over braces or they can be purchased from sports suppliers in shops or online.



## Musicians

Wearing braces may temporarily affect the musical performance of wind instrument players who may have more difficulty reaching the higher notes. However, with practice and motivation, musicians adapt to their braces.

If the patient is wearing removable braces and takes them out to practice, they should be replaced immediately afterwards as the longer braces are out of the mouth, the slower their treatment will be.



## Diet and dental health

Achieving an attractive smile at the end of orthodontic treatment is the ultimate goal but this is not solely the work of the clinician. To ensure that teeth look healthy and white when the braces come off, a careful diet and regular home brushing regime is essential. For instance, patients are advised to limit sugary products to mealtimes and cut out sweet or fizzy drinks. They are also advised to chop up crunchy foods like carrots, apple and celery and to avoid things like baguettes, popcorn and sticky sweets which can damage braces. Brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste is recommended to keep the teeth healthy. For those in braces, it would be ideal to increase this so that you clean your teeth after eating and remove debris.



## Missing school time

Orthodontic treatment typically lasts between 18 and 24 months. During this time, young patients come to the surgery to have their brace adjusted regularly every 6 to 8 weeks. Occasionally extra appointments are necessary if breakages occur. The majority of patients are school children so while every effort is made to offer appointments after school or during the holidays, most appointments will inevitably be during school hours.



The support and co-operation of teachers in helping pupils who occasionally miss lessons is much appreciated