

Orthodontic treatment and braces

Orthodontic treatment is used to help straighten your teeth.

It helps you to take better care of your teeth and gums. It also improves your bite. This makes eating more comfortable. Your smile will benefit, too.

Around a third of children need orthodontic treatment.

Braces

Treatment almost always involves using braces to:

- straighten crooked, crowded or protruding teeth
- close gaps between teeth
- correct the bite so the top and bottom teeth meet when you close your mouth

You'll need to have healthy teeth and gums before you can have a brace fitted. This is because you must have a low sugar intake and be able to keep your teeth and your brace very clean while you're wearing it. Otherwise there is a risk of tooth decay and gum disease during your treatment.

Treatment usually lasts from 18 months to 2 years.

You will need to visit the orthodontist every 6 to 8 weeks. An orthodontist is a dentist trained to diagnose, prevent, and treat teeth and jaw irregularities.

Braces from the HSE

Orthodontic treatment is available for free from the HSE if you have a severe problem with your bite. Referrals to the service need to be made before 16 years of age and are generally made at the time of your 6th class dental check-up.

HSE orthodontic treatment is not usually available for adults. An adult may get treatment for health reasons. This is on a case-by-case basis. Your dentist can give you more information.

If your child cannot get HSE braces

About two-thirds of children don't need orthodontic treatment.

If you think the decision by the HSE to not give your child braces is unfair, talk to your dentist first.

Private treatment

Private treatment is widely available. Fees for private orthodontic treatment usually starts around €3,500 but can be much higher.

[Tax relief on dental treatment](#) is available through the Med2 Scheme. Patients or parents can claim back 20% of the private treatment cost against their income tax.

Orthodontic treatment abroad

You can choose to get orthodontic treatment abroad under the Cross Border Directive (CBD).

The CBD scheme allows you to get the same orthodontic treatment you can get in Ireland, in another EU or EEA country.

You have to pay for any treatment you get abroad. But you can then claim back repayment towards the cost of the healthcare.

Read more about [getting orthodontic treatment under the Cross Border Directive](#)

The best age to have braces

The best age to start braces treatment is often 12 to 13, when all the primary (baby) teeth have been lost but the jaws are still growing. For some children with complex treatment needs, such as multiple missing teeth or needing jaw surgery as part of their treatment, the best time can be in the older teen years.

For younger patients, such as those with impacted permanent front teeth, treatment may need to start shortly after the problem is identified.

The chance for improvement in an adult is more limited. Treatment may also take longer.

How to get braces fitted

If your child needs a brace, their dentist will refer them to an orthodontist. Only registered specialists can call themselves a specialist orthodontist.

Your dentist may have done extra training so they can also do orthodontic treatment.

Some orthodontists work with orthodontic therapists. They can adjust braces under the orthodontist's supervision.

Visit the Dental Council register to [check an orthodontist's or dentists qualifications](#).

What braces look like

Fixed braces



Fixed braces are the most common type of braces.

They are a non-removable brace made up of brackets that are glued to each tooth and linked with wires.

Fixed braces are usually made out of metal, so will be noticeable on the front of your teeth. These are the standard brace for HSE treatment. Removable braces may also be needed to treat children with misaligned jaws.

Clear ceramic fixed braces, which are less visible, are available privately.

Removable aligners



Removable aligners are also available privately. These are clear, flexible plastic mouthguards that fit over teeth to push them into new positions each time an aligner is changed. White attachments fixed onto the teeth for the duration of treatment are nearly always needed to help the aligners move the teeth.

You take them out at mealtimes or to clean them, but are otherwise worn all the time.

Braces and caring for your teeth

Orthodontic treatment usually works very well, but you need to stick with it for it to be successful.

Follow your orthodontist's dietary advice

You need to watch what you eat – for example, avoiding sugary foods and drinks.

Clean your teeth well

Braces can trap food and cause more plaque to build up than usual. You'll need to take extra care with cleaning your teeth.

You should continue to see your regular dentist while having orthodontic treatment.

Wear a retainer

You'll need to wear a retainer for some time after your treatment has finished. This stops your teeth moving back to the position they were in before treatment.

There are many different types of retainers. They can be either removable or permanently fixed onto your teeth.

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