



My Newsletter

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In this Newsletter:

Most Commonly Treated Orthodontic Problems

All orthodontic conditions are as unique and varied as the patients involved, but there are some problems seen more frequently than others. These, too, vary with the patient base. For example, the most common problems for adults are different from those of children. The most common problems can also vary from one ethnic group to another, because many orthodontic problems are hereditary.

For children, the most common orthodontic problems are poor alignment of teeth due to crowding and protrusion of the upper front teeth ahead of the lower teeth (frequently called 'buck teeth') due to the lower jaw being shorter than the upper jaw. The main cause of crowding stems from teeth being larger than the amount of space available in the mouth. The causes for protrusion of the upper jaw can vary from patient to patient and include genetic growth patterns, thumb sucking, tongue thrusting, airway obstructions that cause the child to breathe through the mouth and abnormal eruption of permanent teeth due to loss of baby teeth.

For adults, the most common treatments include correcting crowding or crooked teeth, closing spaces (old or new) between teeth, and correcting the position and alignment of teeth. Even when adult orthodontic problems are the same as those of children, the treatment is different because there is no jaw growth in adults, so problems that could be easily managed in a growing child (such as an upper jaw protrusion) may require surgery in an adult. Adults are also more likely to have gum or bone loss due to periodontal disease and worn, damaged or missing teeth.

Some of the more common orthodontic conditions and the complications they can cause include:

- Overjet (protruded front teeth) - Unattractive and prone to damage
- Crowded Teeth - Unattractive, difficult to clean, bone damage and gum recession
- Underbite (lower front teeth protrude beyond the upper teeth) - Unattractive and uneven wear of the front teeth
- Deepbite (upper front teeth cover the lower teeth) - Excessive wear of the front teeth and gum and bone damage behind the upper front teeth
- Openbite (upper and lower teeth don't meet in front) - Eating problems, speech problems, and excessive wear of those teeth which do meet; unattractive
- Crossbite (upper jaw is too narrow, so lower jaw swings to one side to allow the teeth to mesh) - Biting and chewing difficulties
- Spacing (missing teeth or wide dental arch and small teeth) - Unattractive and allows teeth to shift out of position

Whatever the orthodontic problem, the goal of all orthodontic treatment is to produce a healthy, well-functioning, stable bite. An attractive smile is a pleasant, esteem-lifting, important side effect.

Bruxism

Most people refer to bruxism as "grinding" or "gritting" the teeth. When you "brux", you tightly clamp your top and bottom teeth together, especially your back teeth. Many people who clench also grind their teeth at the same time. Grinding is when you slide your teeth over each other, generally in a sideways, back-and-forth movement. Many people clench and grind their teeth during the day, but the nighttime bruxing is of most concern, because it is harder to control and can lead to eventual jaw, tooth and gum damage.



Experts don't agree on what causes bruxism. Some researchers believe that it's caused by a bite that is not correctly aligned, while others believe it is a central nervous system disorder. Children frequently exhibit bruxism behaviors in response to pain and discomfort of illnesses such as colds, ear infections or allergies. Excess intake of alcoholic beverages may affect your level of grinding and clenching, and stress is also a huge factor in bruxing, with most experts saying that you may show elevated stress levels in your mouth before any other area of your body. Many experts believe it's a combination of these and other problems and that different people brux for different reasons.

Almost everyone "grinds their teeth." The problem is the degree of bruxing. Some people only grind their teeth a bit and show few symptoms, but for those who brux frequently and over a period of many years, the effects on teeth and the surrounding structures of gums and bone can be severe.

The pressure that you can apply to your teeth can range from 100 to 600 pounds per square inch! Severe bruxism can result in wearing or breaking of teeth, sensitive or loose teeth, receding gums, loss of supporting bone around the teeth, bony ridges in the gums, cheek irritation, sore muscles, headaches, earaches and TMJ (temporomandibular jaw) dysfunction. Pain caused by bruxism can also lead to insomnia, depression and even eating disorders.

If you or a family member shows signs or sounds of bruxism, ask your dentist for an evaluation. An examination will rule out disorders, such as an ear infection, that could be causing the symptoms. Once a diagnosis is made, the goals of treatment are to ease pain, prevent damage to teeth and surrounding areas, and reduce bruxism behavior as much as possible.

To prevent damage, your dentist may prescribe a mouth guard or some other appliance, such as a splint, for you to wear at night. Appliances may protect teeth from the pressure of clenching and may even reduce clenching, however some patients find that it makes their bruxism worse. There is no one cure-all for bruxism, so it may take a team effort between you and your dentist and perhaps other dental professionals, such as an orthodontist, to find the cure for your problem.

Just remember that bruxism is not a dangerous disorder and that with conscious effort and professional help, you can prevent damage to your oral and overall health.

The Importance of Brushing

Today, because of better care and dental treatments, more people than ever before are keeping their natural teeth throughout their lives. Although some diseases and conditions can make dental disease and tooth loss more likely, you have a great deal of control over whether you keep your teeth into old age. The most important thing you can do to keep your natural teeth is to brush and floss your teeth regularly.



Most dental hygiene problems are caused by plaque. Plaque is a nearly colorless, sticky layer of bacterial film that forms on your teeth. Composed of microorganisms, food particles and other organic matter, plaque coats your teeth and hides in the nooks and crannies between teeth and below the gum line. The bacteria in plaque produce acids that cause cavities. (Sugary foods, such as candy and cookies, are not the only foods that cause plaque. Starches, such as bread, crackers, and cereal, also cause acids to form. If you snack often, you could be having acid attacks all day long. After many acid attacks, your teeth may decay.)

Build-up of plaque also leads to periodontal disease, also called gum disease. Plaque produces substances that irritate the gums, and after a while, gums may pull away from the teeth. Pockets form and fill with more bacteria. If the gums are not treated, the bone around the teeth can be destroyed. The teeth may become loose or have to be removed. In fact, periodontal disease is a main cause of tooth loss in adults. There is even research that suggests that people with gum disease are more likely to suffer from atherosclerosis (a narrowing of blood vessels), a condition that can precede a stroke or heart attack.

The best way to remove decay-causing, gum-destroying plaque is by brushing and flossing your teeth every day. Brushing removes plaque from your tooth surfaces. Flossing removes plaque from between your teeth and below the gum line, where your toothbrush can't reach.

For good oral hygiene and to keep your natural teeth throughout your life, the American Dental Association recommends that you brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. The size and shape of your brush should fit your mouth, allowing you to reach all areas easily. A worn toothbrush will not do a good job of cleaning your teeth, so replace your toothbrush every three or four months or sooner if the bristles become frayed.

By taking care of your teeth, eating a balanced diet and visiting your dentist regularly, you can have healthy teeth and an attractive smile your entire life.



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