

Time to Start

We agree with the American Association of Orthodontists that children should receive their first orthodontic screening around the age of 7. However, with a large majority of young patients, the time to begin actual treatments is usually between ages 11 and 12 when permanent teeth are in place.

By waiting for permanent teeth, braces will be used for 18-24 months instead of three to four years. The shortened time span of treatment will be less costly.

There are distinct benefits to waiting for permanent teeth:

- The overall time of treatment will be shorter. That means fewer appointments will be necessary and the patient will spend less time in braces.
- The condensed treatment time means there will be less chance of enamel decalcification and root shortening. Also, there will be less time absent from school and less opportunity for broken braces.
- By waiting, a child will grow in maturity and, therefore, have better levels of understanding and cooperation.

Most importantly, there will be a more stable outcome and result in a bright, attractive smile for the pre-teen and teenage patient.

Time to Decide

The optimal treatment time may change due to situations which dictate earlier treatment. For instance, a young patient who has crooked upper front teeth may be embarrassed or even have psychological or social problems. A short period of partial braces can help improve both a smile and self-esteem. Other conditions which warrant early treatments include:

- Crossbites causing the lower jaw to shift.
- Severe jaw imbalances.
- Space maintenance due to the early loss of baby teeth.
- Excessive crowding of teeth.
- Airway and speech problems.