

# 11 THINGS PARENTS SHOULD CONSIDER BEFORE CHOOSING AN ORTHODONTIST



by Dr. Bill Dischinger



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Choosing the right doctor for your family's orthodontic treatment is more confusing than ever. If you are researching different orthodontists, treatment options, types of braces, or whether a clear product like Invisalign is right for you or a loved one, the results can be overwhelming and making a wise decision can seem daunting. To help clarify what important questions to ask, I have composed the following list. I hope you find it helpful.

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# IS THE DOCTOR A SPECIALIST?

A general dentist (often referred to as a restorative or cosmetic dentist) is similar to your family doctor that provides excellent care for your well being, disease prevention, and performance specific procedures. Dentists are great for check-ups, preventative care, filling cavities and performing cosmetic procedures. Here is an interesting fact: all orthodontists are dentists but only about 6% of dentists are orthodontists. An orthodontist is a specialist who has two to three years of additional education and training beyond dental school, and is an expert in designing smiles by gently straightening your teeth. Orthodontists are the experts at choosing the treatment option that's best for you. Whether you're considering clear aligners or traditional braces, an orthodontist has the training, experience and treatment expertise to make sure you get your best smile.

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# WHEN SHOULD YOUR CHILD BE EVALUATED?

The American Association of Orthodontists recommends that all children be evaluated by age 7. People are often surprised that orthodontics can be done on children so young. Many children do not need treatment before age 10, however a certain percentage have problems that are treated much better at a younger age. Left untreated, certain problems can become much harder to correct at an older age. Patients with these certain problems have the best results when treatment is divided into two phases. The first phase ('Phase 1') is a shorter phase to help with jaw growth, making space and allowing for proper tooth development. The later final phase ('Phase 2') is to perfect the smile and the bite. It is important to have your child screened early to ensure they don't have a condition that would require early treatment.

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# DOES THE OFFICE HAVE A GREAT REPUTATION?

Do your homework! Check social media sites like Google and Yelp to see what others are saying about the office. Ask your friends and neighbors what they have heard about offices in the area. It may be worth your while to drive a little further to get higher quality treatment and better customer service.





# DOES THE OFFICE TREAT ADULTS?

With the advent of clear aligners, aesthetic braces, and accelerated treatment, more adults than ever are seeking orthodontic treatment. In our office, 20% of our patients are adults and we have treated several patients in their 80s. Yes, I said 80s. We have yet to find someone 'too old' for treatment. It's never too late to have a beautiful, healthy smile.





# ARE THE RESULTS GUARANTEED?

Many years ago, orthodontists would tell patients that they could stop wearing retainers a year or two after braces were removed. Then, teeth shifted and the wisdom teeth were blamed. Now we know that in order to keep your teeth straight for a lifetime, retainers must be worn indefinitely regardless of the wisdom teeth or any other factor. But, let's face it: not all people will do as instructed, dogs may eat retainers or the retainers may be accidentally thrown away (or lost under the bed). In these cases some teeth will shift and, for some former patients, teeth will need to be re-straightened. It is important to know what will happen and how much things will cost should braces need to be replaced at some point in the future.

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# IS THE QUOTED FEE ALL INCLUSIVE?

Many offices that seem to be ‘lower cost’ have hidden fees that pop up during treatment. Broken braces (all patients, kids and adults, have broken braces from time to time), extra visits, treatment that extends past the estimated treatment time, cancelled appointments, Invisalign refinements, retainers and more can trigger hidden fees at many offices which will raise the price to much more than you bargained for. Be sure to read the fine print and make sure the fee you are quoted is the fee that you will eventually pay. Some offices that seem less expensive upfront actually cost more in the end. Don’t be fooled by artificially low ‘treatment fees’ when the actual total ‘out the door cost’ is much higher.

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# IS THE OFFICE UP TO DATE WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY?

The world is changing rapidly. So too is the world of orthodontics. Advances in braces technology, clear aligners and accelerated treatment make treatment more comfortable, efficient, faster, easier and less noticeable than ever before. Braces can even be placed behind your teeth, but only if the orthodontist spends considerable time, energy and effort investing in learning and mastering the latest techniques. If any doctors suggest extractions, headgear or more than 2 years of treatment, make sure to do your homework and get another opinion.

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## ARE THERE AFFORDABLE MONTHLY PAYMENT AND DOWN PAYMENT OPTIONS?

Braces — even with the best doctors — can be affordable. Zero-down, no interest payment plans should be available for those that can't afford a large down payment. Extended payment plans should be available for those looking for lower monthly payment options. Also, many offices will accept and file your insurance to reduce the out of pocket expense as well as work with flexible spending or health savings accounts which can allow payments to be made pre-tax.

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## DOES THE OFFICE RUN ON TIME?

Unfortunately, your time is not all that valuable to the medical community. We all know that most doctors waiting rooms are exactly that: a place where you wait. Your orthodontist should value your time and be prompt both welcoming you to the visit and getting you out within your scheduled time. Your time is valuable too.

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## DOES THE OFFICE SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY?

The community around an orthodontic office is what supports the practice. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to expect the office to support the community in return. And this doesn't just mean paying for marketing opportunities in local sports programs. The office should be committed to supporting local communities in a meaningful way, set an example for giving back to the children they treat, and provide treatment for underprivileged children in the area.

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# DOES THE OFFICE FEEL FUN?

Orthodontic treatment doesn't have to be awful. It should be fun! Look for the personal touches, fun contests and rewards programs in an office to see how much they truly care about making your child's experience special. Each visit should be something to smile about!

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