

EXPERT Advice

Adult Orthodontics: Am I too Old to Straighten My Teeth or Fix My Bite?



By Dr. Magda Barnard

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How do orthodontics differ in adults from children or teenagers?

Perhaps you have a few teeth that are just a bit (or quite) crooked. Perhaps you had braces as a teen, but you didn't wear your retainers, and now the crowding has returned. Maybe you have a problem with your bite, or your dentist says there isn't enough space for that implant or those veneers



you've always wanted. Or maybe you have an underbite or overbite that you wish you had fixed in your childhood. Now, you are wondering, "Am I too old for braces?" The answer is no! In fact, more and more adults between the ages of 21 and 70 are seeking orthodontics.

Approximately one in three patients visiting an orthodontist's office is an adult. A study by the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) shows that one third of adults are unhappy with their smile, and 36 per cent believe their social life would improve with a better smile. We know that orthodontics is just as successful in adults as it is in children and teens. However, adult orthodontics differ in some ways.

Adults have older teeth and gums. There may be more fillings and bridgework present than we would see in an average teenager. These dental features are not an issue: braces and attachments can be easily bonded to crowns and fillings without damaging the dental work or reducing the effectiveness of the braces.

Gum disease also tends to be more prevalent in adults. Dental cleanings and checkups are always important for any patient, which means if you have braces as an adult you need to see your dentist regularly (which you should be doing anyway). Gum disease must be under control braces start, whether you are a child or an adult. Your orthodontist will check carefully for any signs of gum disease at the initial consultation and may refer you to your dentist or a gum

specialist if there are concerns.

Severe bite issues may be corrected differently in an adult, since the jaw bones are no longer growing. An adult with severe bite discrepancies is more likely to be treated with braces in combination with technological advance (such as temporary anchorage devices) or jaw surgery, whereas a child or teen would most likely be treated with braces and growth modification. Some adults, given these options, chose to align teeth and proceed with orthodontics that camouflage the bite issues in order to avoid jaw surgery or more complicated orthodontics. Regardless of which way you decide to proceed, you can achieve functional and aesthetically appealing results in adulthood.

Also, as an adult, you may have had previous orthodontics treatment. Patients may worry that another round of orthodontics could be harmful for the teeth or that if they go ahead with braces a second time, that teeth may crowd again over time. Rest assured, there are no issues with re-treatment, as long as the teeth and gums are healthy. Also, we know that retainers maintain the alignment that braces or Invisalign create indefinitely. Retainers are comfortable, removable appliances which can be transparent.

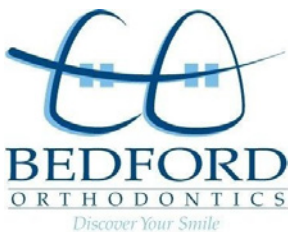
Speaking of transparency, in our next article, we will review clear options to straighten teeth along with some advances in technology that shorten overall treatment and reduce your time in the orthodontist's chair. FLH

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