

# What is an Orthodontist?

Orthodontists are specialists in moving teeth and aligning jaws.

All orthodontists are dentists first. Out of 100 dental school graduates, only six go on to become orthodontists.

## THE PATH TO BECOME AN ORTHODONTIST

1

COLLEGE ▼

2

DENTAL SCHOOL ▼

3

ACCREDITED ORTHODONTIC RESIDENCY PROGRAM ▼

There are three steps in an orthodontist's education: college, dental school and orthodontic residency program. It can take 10 or more years of education after high school to become an orthodontist. After completing college requirements, the prospective orthodontist attends dental school. Upon graduation, the future orthodontist must be accepted\* as a student in an accredited orthodontic residency program, then successfully complete a minimum of two academic years of study. The orthodontic student learns the skills required to manage tooth movement (orthodontics) and guide facial development (dentofacial orthopedics).

- Only those who have successfully completed this formal education may call themselves "orthodontists."
- Orthodontists limit their scope of work to orthodontics only.\*\*
- Orthodontists are uniquely qualified in the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of orthodontic problems. They dedicate their professional lives to creating healthy, beautiful smiles in children, teens and adults. Well-aligned teeth are more than attractive: they make it possible to bite, chew and speak effectively. Orthodontic care is often part of a comprehensive oral health plan.
- Orthodontists use a variety of "appliances," including braces, clear aligner trays and retainers, to move teeth or hold them in their new positions. Because of orthodontists' advanced education and clinical experience, they have the knowledge and skills necessary to recommend the best kind of appliance to meet every individual patient's treatment goals.
- Only orthodontists are eligible for membership in the American Association of Orthodontists.

\*On average, there are about 15 applicants for every opening.

\*\*Unless they have also completed specialty education in another dental specialty recognized by the American Dental Association.

**American Association of Orthodontists**  
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