

THE BASICS OF BRACES...



By: J. Richard Morris, Jr., DMD.

One of the questions I hear most frequently is "Why do children seem to be getting braces so young now?" It's an excellent question and a question that does not have a "one size fits all" answer. I believe in a conservative approach for young patients. There is no point rushing into early treatment that will involve unnecessary expense for the parent and no long-term benefit for the child. After all, the older a patient is, the more likely they will practice good oral hygiene, be compliant with wearing their retainers, and follow instructions to protect the investment their parents have made in their smile.

That being said, some orthodontic problems need to be corrected at an

early age. The American Association of Orthodontists recommends that all children receive an orthodontic check-up no later than the age of 7. At this age, an orthodontist can identify subtle problems with jaw growth and the emerging permanent teeth. While the majority of children seen at this age will not require orthodontic treatment until they are between the ages of 9 and 14, an orthodontist will be able to determine if your child will benefit from early treatment.

When a child visits our practice for their first orthodontic check-up, we do an examination of their mouth, take pictures and x-rays if appropriate and perform an evaluation of the patient's need for orthodontic treatment. We try to get

to know the patient, learn about their feelings concerning their existing smile and orthodontic treatment, and assess their oral hygiene practices. After all, the patient plays a critical role in the successful outcome of their orthodontic treatment. At this initial appointment, we will determine if the child needs immediate orthodontic treatment. I only recommend early treatment when we can intercept a developing problem, positively guide the development of the jaw and bones that support the teeth, or prevent a problem from developing. In over 80% of the patients we see at this age, we are able to simply schedule another appointment for six to 12 months in the



future to continue to monitor their growth and dental development. We want to encourage parents to keep an eye on their children's oral development, so we do not charge for these

growth and development appointments or the initial consultation.

It's important for parents to know that even straight teeth can be hiding a problem with the child's bite. There are some clues parents can look for that may indicate the need for early orthodontic care: an unbalanced facial appearance, protruding teeth, early or late loss of

baby teeth, biting the cheek or biting into the roof of the mouth, thumb-sucking, jaws that are too far forward or too far back, upper and lower teeth that don't meet correctly, grinding and clenching of the teeth, breathing through the mouth and difficulty in chewing. These are all problems that need to be evaluated by an orthodontist.

Not everyone needs early orthodontic treatment, but if your child does, it's important to start that treatment when you have the greatest chance of success. I'm able to tell the parents of most of our 7 year-old patients that no treatment is needed at that time, but when early orthodontic treatment can be more successful and prevent more severe problems later in life, I will make that recommendation. I have three young children myself, and they always guide my treatment plans for my patients. I do for my patients exactly what I would do for my own children in the same situation. No more and no less. ❖

Dr. Morris is a graduate of Georgia Tech and the Medical College of Georgia. He completed his Orthodontics Residency at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. His practice, Morris Orthodontics, is located in Hendersonville, where Dr. Morris also lives with his wife and three children. For more information or to schedule an appointment, visit morrisbraces.com.

