



Are Braces Right for Your Child?

From: India-Jewel Jackson/GLAM.com

Deciding to have braces put on your child's teeth is a major decision. Not only is it a huge financial undertaking, you also have to consider the length of treatment and the amount of pain, amongst other factors. **Dr. Olga Bukholts**, Director of [Perfect Smiles Orthodontics](#) in Manhattan, shares 20 tips every parent should be aware of before visiting the orthodontist.

Tip #1: Is Thumb Sucking OK? Gentle finger and thumb sucking, or sucking on a pacifier, is harmless as long as the habit stops at around the age of 6 when the first molars erupt.

Tip #2: Do Orthodontic Pacifiers Help? They're often a marketing ploy. Their "medically-designed" shape isn't any more beneficial or harmful to your child's mouth than traditional pacifiers.

Tip #3: Early Warning Signs. Your first inkling that orthodontics may be in your child's future is when all of his or her baby teeth have come in, typically by age 3. There should be generous spaces between the teeth, so permanent teeth will have a better chance of erupting without crowding one another.

Tip #4: Beyond Aesthetics. Many people believe that their children need orthodontics only if their front teeth are crooked. But even if they have a great smile, an orthodontic treatment may be needed if there is a bite problem, which isn't always apparent. As with anything in health care, prevention is key. Orthodontists can catch and treat potential problems before they grow worse and help prevent future conditions, such as tooth wear, periodontal disease or TMJ problems.

Tip #5: It's All About Timing. Ideally, when your children reach the age of 11 or 12, which is also the time their 12-year molars have erupted, take them to an orthodontist to have their teeth and bite evaluated.

Tip #6: To Dual or Not To Dual. Current research indicates that, in most cases, dual treatment plans — braces at age eight or nine, and again at age 11 or 12 — do not provide better or longer-lasting results.

Tip #7: When to Start. If timed right, most children who begin an orthodontic program at the beginning of seventh grade can have perfectly aligned teeth and a beautiful smile by the time they enter high school.

Tip #8: Don't Rush. Keep in mind that orthodontic devices are generally not prescribed on the first appointment. Wait until a thorough consultation has been completed, which includes the creation and review of a complete set of dental records through a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation. This way, a personalized treatment plan can be designed.

Tip #9: More About Alignment. A poorly aligned bite can place stress on teeth, and may lead to excess tooth wear, gum deterioration and eventual tooth loss in adulthood. Severely crowded teeth can also be difficult to floss and keep clean — a potential contributing factor to later periodontal disease.

Tip #10: Physical Side-Effects. A severely misaligned bite can place unnecessary stress on the temporomandibular (jaw) joint, which may lead to its deterioration over time and produce a variety of symptoms such as jaw pain and tightness, headaches, neck and shoulder aches.

Tip #11: Go Digital. Digital imaging machines emit less radiation than traditional x-rays that use film. The latest machines give panoramic, crystal-clear images of your child's mouth, teeth and skull, allowing an orthodontist to examine their interrelationship. In addition, cephalometric x-rays produce images of the temporomandibular (jaw) joint in both opened and closed positions, enabling detailed diagnosis of joint problems.

Tip #12: Time Savers. Orthodontists who use advanced teeth and jaw alignment techniques can reduce your child's treatment time by as much as 50 percent, improve treatment quality and protect the future health of their teeth.

Tip #13: Comfortable Alternative. There are now options to old-fashioned braces. Consider metal or porcelain braces that replace rubber bands with a special door that keeps a wire in a bracket to help bring the tooth into its optimal position. Besides being more comfortable, they're easier to keep clean and can dramatically speed up the straightening process.

Tip #14: No More Metal. The new Invisalign for Teens system is a series of clear, acrylic mouthpieces that invisibly align teeth and, in some cases, eliminate the need for traditional metal or porcelain braces. An indicator device monitors compliance.

Tip #15: Mini Implant, Big Results. Mini implants can be inserted between teeth to speed up the alignment process by as much as 30 percent. In cases of congenitally missing teeth, they can also support temporary crowns and stay in the mouth until the child's growth is completed and traditional implants can be placed.

Tip #16: Added Comfort. In some cases, mini-implants can replace the need to wear extraoral appliances, such as headgears. Typically worn at home and while sleeping (for about 12 hours/day), headgears can be uncomfortable and rely on patient compliance to achieve good results. Mini-implants, however, can decrease treatment time and improve results.

Tip #17: Speed Matters. When possible, speeding up the alignment process is healthier for your child's teeth and gums. Prolonged treatment may stress the root of the tooth and result in root resorption, which, in severe cases, can cause tooth loss. Likewise, extended treatments can decrease patient compliance, often leading to poor oral hygiene, enamel decalcification (white spots on teeth around braces), gingival hyperplasia and other gum problems.

Tip #18: Night Grinding. Do any of your children grind their teeth at night? If so, don't ignore it. This is not a harmless habit. The force that goes into grinding the teeth can lead to joint damage. If grinding occurs during a growth spurt, it can also impede joint development and prevent the lower jaw from growing to its full potential, causing future misalignment and aesthetic problems.

Tip #19 Kick Bad Habits. Many habits can negatively affect tooth alignment, such as tongue thrusting, mouth breathing, nail biting, lip biting and pencil chewing.

Tip #20: Don't Compromise. One or more qualified orthodontists may tell you that several teeth need to be extracted from your child's mouth to produce the best result. Follow their advice. Don't search for other doctors who are willing to treat your child - without removing these teeth. Your child's teeth could relapse, and retreatment may become necessary. Also, in some cases the results are esthetically inferior.

Perfect Smiles Orthodontics is located at 263 West End Avenue at 72nd Street in Manhattan and on the web at <http://www.perfectsmilesny.com>. For more information, call 646.368.1819.