

Is Two-Phase Orthodontic Treatment Really Necessary?

Your best friend says, "One of my daughter's little friends just got braces on. She is only eight years old, and hasn't even lost all her baby teeth. Isn't she too young for orthodontic treatment?" How would you answer? As a good mom, do you feel pressured that maybe your eight years old need braces now, too?

Two-phase orthodontic treatment (also known as early, preventative, or interceptive treatment) is an approach to care that remains controversial in orthodontic circles. While most university studies suggest that the same bite can be achieved in a single phase of braces after all the permanent teeth are in, these studies do not take into consideration all the variables that are in play.

Most of the studies suggest that the same orthodontic results are attainable whether the problems are addressed in a single or in multiple phases. These studies do not consider the soft tissue and psychological aspects of the treatment provided. If we are not talking about treatment efficiency and cost, these are two key areas where two-phase treatment provides benefits over waiting until all the permanent teeth are in place.

Even though there is no way to prove that interceptive care makes the final orthodontic results easier to achieve, most orthodontists believe that early treatment does just that. Early treatment may convert some extraction cases into simple expansion cases. Early treatment can in some cases even eliminate the need for full braces altogether, although this is definitely the exception to the rule. If a child has a condition serious enough to call for treatment at age seven or eight, it is almost certain that he or she will need to have their treatment finished in a second phase as a teenager.

The appearance of the gum tissues around the teeth is affected by where the permanent teeth grow into the mouth. If a child has a lot of crowding and the canines come in very high (like fangs), the tissue over those teeth will always be higher than the surrounding teeth, even if grafting is performed. Expanding the dental arches to encourage normal eruption usually helps prevent most of these gum problems. These soft tissue problems are not taken into consideration in the studies that question the value of two-phase treatment.

Other than the patients who really need two-phase treatment (The problems I listed at the first page), perhaps the most important reason for interceptive treatment at age seven or eight is the psychological benefit that it provides for our young patients. Even if a similar result is possible at age 13, it is hard to erase the scars of four or five years of ridicule and embarrassment that many times go with "fangs" or "overbites." Our young people have enough problems with self-esteem without having to worry about their teeth. Early orthodontic correction of orthodontic problems can not only reduce the joking and name calling, it can turn a liability into an asset. Two-phase orthodontic treatment can give a child a beautiful smile that improves self-esteem and many times changes the way they approach the world. However, if you don't think your children are embarrassed with their crooked smiles and there are no major issues as I indicated, it is more efficient and cheaper to do one time orthodontic treatment after age 10 and above. **Make sure your children still see me every six months for observation appointment, even though they don't need orthodontic treatment at this time! I want to closely monitor their growth and development until they are ready for braces!**

If you are still confused, let me help you make final decisions, since I have been known for one of the most honest orthodontist in the world... A mother of two daughters and want to treat your children like my own! Guaranteed!



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