

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO START ORTHODONTIC TREATMENT

By Dr. Victoria Chen, aka Caddie Mom & Smile Makeover Wiz

The American Association of Orthodontics recommends all children should be seen by orthodontists **NO LATER THAN the AGE of 7!** Yes! Please call your orthodontist now if your children are older than 7 years old but have not seen orthodontists. I am not trying to scare you, but some parents may regret not doing so down the road.



In my practices, there are less than 5% of my patients who really need to start treatment before age of 10. Most children will not start braces till the age of 10-11. Girls typically can start braces earlier at the age of 10, since girls' growth and development are earlier than boys'. We often see some boys who do not start braces till an age of 13-14 due to their late growth and development.

Almost all orthodontists offer complimentary consultations for children's first consultations and typically continue to monitor them periodically – every 6-12 months – until they are ready for braces. Why not take great advantage of this opportunity for the experts to closely monitor your children's growth and development? It is literally free!

As I mentioned earlier, there are less than 5% of our children who really need to have some sort of orthodontic treatment prior to age of 10. Some orthodontists call it "phase I", and some call it "limited early treatment". Patients may need braces again at the age of 11-13, called "phase II". Here is a list of some of the definite criteria why we orthodontists can't wait until a later age to treat your children:

- ☐ Cross bite for back teeth
- ☐ Cross bite for front teeth (Underbite)
- ☐ Limited cross bite of front teeth causing gum recession of lower front teeth
- ☐ Protrusive front teeth which may be easily traumatized from accidents (Sports trauma)
- ☐ Impacted adult teeth
- ☐ Early loss of baby teeth (Ectopic eruption of adult teeth)
- ☐ Thumb sucking habits with front teeth open bite
- ☐ Children are teased at school due to crooked or funny-looking teeth
- ☐ Children may have a speech problem due to the bite
- ☐ Cleft lips and palate

Unfortunately, most patients who need "phase I" at an early stage will still need full braces (phase II) again at a later age. This two-phase treatment always carries a higher cost of treatment fees for the parents and longer treatment time for the children. Unlike your dental insurance benefit, most orthodontic insurance only pay for braces one time (lifetime benefit), not every year. Luckily, not too many children require early treatment. Other than the above problems I mentioned above that must be treated immediately, most of our children can start braces about age 11. Some orthodontists will preach early treatment to avoid future extraction or jaw surgery in the future. However, well-designed research has shown that early treatment will not prevent future extraction or jaw surgery. Most of the problems can be treated with one-time braces when our children are age 11-13, and it delivers almost identical results with children who have braces twice.



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