

The School Years: An Introduction to Orthodontics

- **What is Orthodontics?**

- Orthodontics is the speciality of dentistry that is concerned with the relationships and the positions of the jaws and teeth.
- Your orthodontist may take models, photographs and x-rays of your teeth and use these records with you and your parents to help you decide about what treatment you may benefit from next.
- Your orthodontist will often monitor your growth and dental development as well.
- The type of orthodontics you may need will depend upon the type of cleft you have.

- **Why do some Children with a Cleft need Orthodontics?**

- The positions and relationships of the teeth and jaws may be improved with orthodontic treatment.
- Often the teeth can be moved with braces to improve their position which has both functional and appearance benefits.
- Braces may also be required in preparation for some surgical operations.
- Braces may be removable or may be fixed and you are likely to need a retainer brace afterwards to keep the benefits over the long term. These retainers may also be fixed or removable.

- **Dental Health Issues**

- It is crucial that your teeth are healthy before any braces can be considered.
- If the teeth are poorly looked after and there is damage from decay or poor brushing, orthodontic treatment may not be possible.
- It is very important to access care either from your local dentist or from a community or hospital specialist children's dentist.
- Please speak to the cleft team if you have a problem accessing this vital care, we may be able to help.
- When you are wearing braces, it is strongly advised that you brush your teeth and braces after your breakfast in the morning, after every snack or meal, and in the evening before bed.

- **What effect may Orthodontic treatment have on me?**

- Your teeth maybe tender for a few days after the braces are adjusted so you may need to take the painkiller you use / your parents give you for a headache if required.
- It is very strongly advised that you use a mouth guard for contact sports.
- Use a self mouldable type of guard as you can adjust these to fit again as your teeth move.
- If you are using removable braces or retainers, keep them safely (ideally in a brace box) when you take them out for eating or for sports / activities.
- Help your cleft team to achieve the best result for you – a winning smile is what we're all after.

- **What Effect may Orthodontic Treatment have on me at School?**

- Time off School for Appointments

- For any orthodontic treatment, you will need to visit your orthodontist on a 4-8 weekly basis to continue your orthodontic treatment
- Appointments are usually held in clinics at the hospital which may clash with school hours and these are normally booked 4-8 weeks in advance and are usually flexible around important school activities.
- These appointments may be more frequent just before and just after any planned operations.
- Tooth brushing
- We are to strongly encourage children wearing braces to brush after any snack or meal even at school.

- **What Orthodontic Treatment May be Involved at Key Stage 1 (age 5-7)?**

- Adult Teeth Come In and Baby Teeth Fall Out
- During this stage the first of the adult teeth will erupt and the first of the baby teeth may fall out.
- The new upper front teeth may come in biting the wrong way around, biting behind the lower front teeth and so a brace may be needed to move them forward to get their position correct.
- This treatment may be done with either a removable or a fixed brace and is usually simple but may take about 6-12 months to sort out.
- Preparation for a bone graft (as per key Stage 2) may also begin early perhaps at 7yrs old if the patient has their teeth through early.

- **What Orthodontic Treatment May be Involved at Key Stage 2 (age 7-11)?**

- Orthodontic Preparation for Bone Graft surgery
- If the cleft involves the tooth bearing portion of the gum, then it is possible that the upper jaw may need widening with braces before an operation to fill the gap with some bone at the bone graft operation.
- This orthodontic treatment is designed to allow the surgeons to place bone in the gap to allow the adult teeth to grow down when they are ready (usually completed by about 13 years old).
- During this time it is possible that some gaps in your palate or gum may become bigger.
- These may temporarily effect your talking or may increase foods and drinks leaking into your nose but these symptoms will stop once the surgery is completed and the gaps are closed up.
- Normally this phase of treatment may take about 12 months before the operation and the brace may well stay on for about 4 months after the operation.
- On occasions, if you need, other surgical adjustments can be done at the same time as the bone graft.
- Between 8 and 12 weeks after your bone graft surgery, you may be able to have further orthodontic treatment to straighten up your front teeth that were twisted or leaning over alongside the cleft at the front of your mouth.
- Your orthodontist may be able to complete this before you change schools and once the front teeth are better positioned, they may be held with a retainer whilst the remaining adult teeth come through.
- If no more orthodontics is needed at this point, you will be checked up to see the progress of the arrival of your permanent teeth.

- **What Orthodontic Treatment May be Involved at Key Stage 3 (age 11-15)?**
- Dental Development
- During this phase the last permanent teeth should come in and the last baby teeth fall out and patients often start their rapid phase of growth as they move into their mid teens.

- Routine Orthodontic Treatment
- Where the jaws are reasonably aligned, the teeth can be moved with orthodontic braces to improve their positions and their bite.
- Usually fixed braces are used and this may well be the last and definitive orthodontics.
- On completion you'll need to wear retainers and you will be weaned down to sleeping hours only during the year after the braces are completed.
- We usually suggest that to keep things perfect, the retainers should be worn when asleep for 1-2 nights a week indefinitely.

- Jaw Growth and Development
- Your orthodontist will monitor the positions of the teeth and also the relationships of the jaws too.
- Jaw growth may be out of balance in some patients with any type of cleft and if this is the case there are treatments that may be offered.
- With an underdeveloped lower jaw, a brace that harnesses your growth may be helpful and it may be suggested that patients wear one during the growth phase to encourage the jaw to 'grow forwards'.
- If the lower jaw seems stronger than the upper or if a weaker lower jaw remains and growth is complete then it may be that patients are offered orthodontics and jaw surgery or jaw distraction.
- At around 15-16 years old, treatment may start with some fixed orthodontic braces.
- These position the teeth in preparation for the jaws to be surgically moved into a better position.
- The surgery will usually be carried out only once it is believed that growth has stopped – this is commonly at about 16-21 years old, perhaps at the earlier end of the scale for girls and later for boys.
- This treatment plan can take 2-3 years to complete and will be followed by retainers as usual.