

SPECIAL REPORT

The Benefits of Early Orthodontic Treatment for Your Child

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INTRODUCTION

Two-phase orthodontic treatment seems to be more popular today than ever before. In fact, it is not uncommon nowadays to see braces on elementary school children. While not all children need two phases of orthodontic treatment, the American Association of Orthodontists recommends that every child should be evaluated by an orthodontist by age 7. This gives your child a chance to be treated for any underlying problems with the teeth or jaw that would otherwise lead to more invasive, difficult, or expensive treatments later on.

If your orthodontist determines during an early evaluation that your child doesn't need Two-Phase treatment, then you can go home with peace of mind and the knowledge that waiting for treatment will not lead to greater problems later in life. However, if your orthodontist does recommend Two-Phase treatment for your child, then you can proceed with the certainty that your child's early evaluation and treatment will help to ensure an overall easier transition to braces, as well as additional lifelong dental and facial benefits.

The purpose of this report is to help you understand exactly what Two-Phase orthodontic treatment is and how it can benefit your child throughout his or her life.



WHAT IS PHASE-ONE TREATMENT?

Phase-One orthodontic treatment addresses early-age problems that could lead to dental issues later in life, including potential difficulty with braces treatment. Some signs that your child may benefit from Phase-One treatment include:

- Excessive tooth crowding
- Insufficient jaw space for permanent teeth
- Overly fast or slow growth of upper or lower jaw
- Upper or lower jaw that is too wide, too narrow, or crooked
- Presence of oral habits that can cause tooth misalignment and other problems, such as finger and thumb sucking

The purpose of first-phase orthodontic treatment is to address issues like these before the permanent teeth have fully erupted. By working to fix some of these problems early, your orthodontist can help ensure that your child will have a much easier time with orthodontic treatment and overall dental health after the permanent teeth have come in completely.

Most Phase-One treatments begin around age 7 or 8, when the incisors are developing. Because children are growing rapidly at this time, they can benefit enormously from early treatment. At this age, children also tend to be most eager and cooperative. Phase-One treatments typically last from 6 to 18 months, depending on the severity of the condition.



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PHASE-ONE TREATMENT?

Some of the common goals and benefits of Phase-One treatment include:

GOAL – Develop more space within the jaws, so the permanent teeth have room to erupt.

- **BENEFIT** – Prevent the need to extract healthy permanent teeth later.
- **BENEFIT** – Allow for a more youthful long-term facial appearance.
- **BENEFIT** – Decrease the time in braces during Phase-Two treatment.

GOAL – Correctly relate the jaws to each other while they are still in development.

- **BENEFIT** – Prevent the need for future jaw surgery to expand and/or align the jaws.

GOAL – Stop problematic habits, such as finger or thumb sucking.

- **BENEFIT** – Minimize misaligned teeth caused by finger sucking.

The ultimate benefit of Phase-One treatment, of course, is that your child may be able to achieve ideal results that are often not possible after his or her permanent teeth have erupted.



AFTER PHASE-ONE: THE OBSERVATION STAGE

After the appliances are removed and retainers are provided, your child will begin the transitional observation stage. The goal of this period is to observe and evaluate the growth and development (at 4 to 6-month appointment intervals) to determine the optimal time to start the second phase of treatment.

Oftentimes, retainers may be used (although usually for only a short period, as they may interfere with the eruption of the adult teeth). In some cases, selective removal of certain primary (baby) teeth may be in the best interest of enhancing eruption of your child's permanent teeth. On occasion, a child's permanent teeth can erupt more rapidly than anticipated, as well. Don't worry if this happens. In this type of case, you (the parent or guardian) will be advised, and your child will continue directly into the second phase of treatment without an observation stage.

When completed, a successful Phase-One and observation period will have created enough room for the teeth to find an adequate eruption path and prevent possible impaction and displacement problems.

Keep in mind: When Phase-One treatment ends, your child's teeth won't be in their final position yet. This will be determined and accomplished by Phase-Two treatment, aka the corrective phase.



WHAT IS PHASE-TWO TREATMENT?

At the beginning of your child's Phase-One treatment, orthodontic records are made, and a diagnosis and treatment plan is established. Certain types of appliances are used during Phase One, as dictated by the problem.

Phase Two treatment is initiated when most of your child's permanent teeth have erupted, usually around age 11 to 13, and it typically requires braces to be worn on all of the teeth for approximately 15 to 24 months. Oftentimes, effective Phase-One treatment can pave the way to less-involved clear aligner therapy (no braces). Your child's orthodontist will be able to speak with you further about these and other options.



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PHASE-TWO TREATMENT?

Each tooth has an exact location in the mouth where it is in harmony with the cheeks, tongue, jaws, jaw joints, and other teeth. When this equilibrium is established, the teeth can function together properly. With Phase-Two treatment, good home care (brushing & flossing), and consistent retainer wear, your child's teeth should stay healthy, stable, comfortable, and attractive-looking. This is the goal of the second (final) and corrective phase of treatment.



AFTER PHASE-TWO: THE RETENTION STAGE AND BEYOND

When your child's braces have been removed, this begins the retention phase of treatment. The retention phase involves the fitting and use of retainers, which your child will need to wear at a frequency and duration prescribed by your orthodontist. Typically, retainers are worn all day and night at first, and then your child can eventually transition to wearing them only at night. The retention phase will last approximately 6 to 12 months, and your child's orthodontic treatment will be complete when this phase ends. It will still be recommended, however, that your child continue to wear his or her retainer at bedtime indefinitely.

Your child's final orthodontic result depends on these retainers. Without them, the teeth can shift back to their old, misaligned position. By using a retainer faithfully and according to your orthodontist's instructions, your child can ensure that he or she will enjoy a beautiful, healthy new smile for a lifetime.





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