

METAL IS BEAUTIFUL: Getting Your Child Braces

By : Yvette Stines, M.Ed, M.S.



Braces have become a fun experience for kids. They have the opportunity to choose different colors, and they can be creative and show their personality.

our child's dentist is recommending braces. This is a big adjustment that will create some minor changes in your child's life and most will be

some of the top orthodontists and dentists to help you through the maze of metal.

Dr. Steven Lash of Lash Ortho-

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excited. For the parents, the orthodontic process may be confusing in regards to getting the right type of braces that work best for your child. Black Health Magazine sat down with

dontics in West Bloomfield, Mich., works along with his daughter, Dr. Rebecca Rubin, who is a graduate of the Harvard School of Dental Medicine. Together they work hard to

create wonderful smiles. Dr. Lash suggests the proper age for your child to visit the orthodontist is "by age 7 or 8, once the permanent incisors have begun to erupt. If there is a problem that is recognized earlier, then an appointment with an orthodontist is appropriate," he says. An orthodontic visit is usually recommended by the patient's dentist. It is important "to see a general dentist who will recommend that you see an orthodontist," says Dr. William Woodruff, who is in private practice in West Bloomfield, Mich.

During the first orthodontic visit, Dr. Lash explains that the "child will be examined by the orthodontist and the condition of his teeth will be charted. A pantographic x-ray to check the

condition of unerupted teeth may be necessary at this time," he explains. "The orthodontist will discuss the findings and whether treatments are or will be necessary." Dr. Lash stresses that this is "the time to ask questions." Before the appointment, parents should explain to their children the purpose of this visit. "It is important for parents to talk with their kids about the overall health benefits of having braces while they are still young and growing. The ability to correct jaw and bite problems is much easier for adolescents so long as they follow the doctors advice and directions when they are going through treatment," says Jennifer Houser, DMD. Dr. Woodruff encourages releasing fear from your child by keeping the explanation as simple as possible by telling them "that there will be no injection or shots. It is a required visit that will determine if you need braces," he says.

If your child does need braces, there are many different types to choose

from. Dr. Lash explains the purpose of each of the top five appliances for braces:

According to Dr. Lash, the term braces commonly refers to an arch wire that is attached to brackets that are individually cemented to each tooth. The wire fits in a slot in the bracket and it is the wire that actually provides the forces that move the teeth.

Traditional Metal Braces: These are the most common. The stainless steel braces are very efficient and cost effective. The brackets come in various designs and sizes and there are a number of methods of attaching the wires to the brackets. Often colorful ties are used. If a patient prefers not to use colors, then clear or grey ties can be used. These are the braces that are most visible.

Ceramic or Plastic Braces: These are the same as traditional metal braces but are less visible. There are white wires that can be used. The brackets are recommended for our adult patients who are concerned about esthetics. There is a modest increase in cost for the ceramic brackets, and a little bit more care is necessary because plastic brackets tend to discolor after six to nine months.

Lingual braces: These are special brackets and wire that attach to lingual or inner surfaces of the teeth. Because they are on the back of the teeth, they are virtually invisible.

Invisalign: This is a relatively new method of straightening teeth. The system involves the use of successive clear plastic aligners to adjust irregularities in the teeth. Invisaligns are



made from a prescription sent to the Invisalign laboratory by the dentist or orthodontist and the patient receives a new set of aligners every two weeks. This system is recommended for simple orthodontic problems such as mild crowding or spacing. Teenagers can use Invisalign as long as the permanent teeth are fully erupted. He also warns our readers about the ads in the back of magazines; it is important to have a professional consultation.

Other Appliances

Expanders: This appliance is used to correct cross bites or transverse problems. A transverse problem exists when the upper teeth fit inside the lower teeth rather than the upper teeth fitting outside the lower teeth.

Retainers: Its purpose is to "retain" the finished result; these appliances are used after the braces are removed.

Headgear: Headgears are used to support the braces; they can efficiently direct forces to specific teeth when necessary. They can be uncomfortable and unattractive. Patients who are required to use headgear should use it at night only.

Elastics: These are also known as rubber bands. They are worn attached to the braces and their purpose is to provide forces that assist the arch wires in moving the teeth.

While your child has braces, there are some items that every child needs to properly care for their braces. "Soft toothbrushes are recommended. Have two brushes. Use

them alternatively and throw them out when the ends begin to curl," says Dr. Lash.

Dr. Hauser adds that "it is extremely important to avoid hard, sticky, crunchy and chewy foods when going through orthodontic treatment. By following the treatment plan designed by the orthodontist and being actively involved with proper care of the braces, the treatment will go smoothly and quickly. Patient cooperation and compliance is key," she says.

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Did you know?

Kids should visit the orthodontist by the age 7 to spot problems early.