

Braces and orthodontics



Braces are in high demand. More than 200,000 children and adults in England and Wales started orthodontic treatment last year. Here are the answers to some common questions about this type of dental treatment.

Why have braces?

The purpose of orthodontic treatment is to make the best of your teeth. This includes allowing you to bite correctly, eat more comfortably, and to care for your teeth and gums more easily. And your smile will benefit, too.

Treatment almost always involves using braces to straighten crooked, crowded or protruding teeth, close gaps between teeth, and correct the bite of the teeth so the top and bottom teeth meet when you close your mouth.

Treatment usually lasts from 18 months to two years, and visits to the orthodontist are needed every four to six weeks.

How common is orthodontic treatment?

According to the British Orthodontic Society, 202,300 people started orthodontic treatment in England and Wales in 2014-15.

The vast majority were children, with 72,300 children under 13 years old and 128,500 children aged 13 to 17 beginning orthodontic treatment to straighten their teeth last year. Braces are usually more successful in children, which is why most orthodontic patients are children.

Fewer than 1 in 100 orthodontic patients are adults – just 1,500 adults began orthodontic treatment in England and Wales in 2014-15.

But more adults than ever now want treatment, many having missed out when they were children.

Are braces available on the NHS?

Orthodontic treatment is available free on the NHS for under-18s who need it. Treatment is also available on the NHS at the standard charge for complex dental treatment (just under £219) for adults who need it. However, adults who want orthodontic treatment to fix minor cosmetic problems aren't eligible for NHS treatment.

Can I have private treatment?

Private treatment is widely available but expensive. The British Orthodontic Society says fees vary, but are usually around £2,000 to £2,500. However, they can be much higher.

One advantage of private treatment is you have a wider choice of braces, including clear or [invisible braces](#).

What's the best age to have braces?

The ideal age to have orthodontic treatment is around 12 or 13, while you're still growing. The opportunity for improvement in an adult is more limited and surgery is more likely to be needed.

How do I get braces fitted?

To get braces fitted you need to be referred to an orthodontist by your dentist.

If you want to check the qualifications of your orthodontist, use the [definitive list of specialist orthodontists](#) held by the General Dental Council. By law, only registered specialists can call themselves a specialist orthodontist.

What are braces like?

There are many different types of braces. Some are removable, which you take out at night, to eat a meal, or clean. Some are fixed and stay in all the time. NHS braces are made of metal, but plastic and ceramic ones are also available privately. Some of these are clear, so you can hardly see them on your teeth.

Read more about [different types of braces](#).

How successful are braces?

Orthodontics usually works very well, but it's important to look after your teeth while you're wearing braces. Braces can trap food and cause more plaque to build up than usual.

You need to take extra care cleaning your teeth and watch what you eat – for example, by avoiding sugary foods and drinks. You also need to see your dentist regularly while having orthodontic treatment.

Read more about [looking after your teeth while wearing braces](#).

What if I'm refused NHS braces?

If you think you or your child is being refused NHS treatment unfairly or the waiting list for treatment is unreasonably long, contact your local branch of [NHS England](#), [Health in Wales](#) and [NHS Health Scotland](#).

Find out more about [orthodontics or braces](#).