

# Adults & Orthodontics

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What you need to know about choosing and undergoing orthodontic treatment as an adult.



Australian Society  
of Orthodontists



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## Our smiles are one of our most important features.

It's one of the first things we notice when we greet each other, it's the way we interact together, and the way we remember one another after we say goodbye.

We all want to be able to smile with confidence, so it comes as no surprise that more and more Australian adults are looking into orthodontic treatment. Nowadays, around one in every five orthodontic patients are adults.

There are many reasons why you might undertake orthodontic treatment as an adult and, with advancements in orthodontic treatment, there are plenty of options available to you that will fit in with your current lifestyle. We've put together this e-book to ensure your orthodontic journey is as smooth as possible.

## What is an orthodontist?

While orthodontists and dentists share many similarities, specialisation is what sets an orthodontist apart and makes them an expert in their field.

After completing a general dental degree, orthodontists complete an additional three years of full-time university, which adds up to around 5,000 hours of extra education and hands on experience. This rigorous training makes them the specialists when it comes to treating issues relating to the alignment of the teeth and jaws.

An orthodontist is therefore the most qualified and experienced person to ensure you get the healthy and confident smile you deserve.

**100%**  
**of orthodontists**  
**are dentists**



**3%**  
**of dentists are**  
**orthodontists**



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## What makes teeth crooked?

This is a very common question, but there's no one-size-fits-all answer. Teeth can grow incorrectly for a number of reasons, including:

**Genetics:** When extra teeth or large teeth create a crooked smile, genetics is usually at play. In most cases, underbites, overbites and crooked teeth are inherited. Unfortunately this means they can't be avoided, but they can be treated – even in adults!

**Oral habits:** Prolonged oral habits during childhood, such as thumb sucking or lip biting, can cause misalignment of front teeth and adverse changes to the bite. Even chronic mouth breathing, often caused by airway obstructions such as enlarged tonsils, can have a negative impact on teeth as they grow.

**Loss of teeth:** Losing baby teeth too early as a child can mean there's less space for adult teeth to come through. Losing adult teeth can

cause the teeth next to the lost tooth to drift into its space, and the opposing tooth can over erupt. All these teeth movements can lead to misalignment of front teeth and adverse changes to the bite.

**Other dental problems:** Some general dental problems can lead to problems with the way teeth align. For example, gum disease reduces the support for teeth and allows teeth to move even under normal function. Other problems such as teeth grinding can wear down the back teeth, leading to a deepening of the bite and increased wear of the front teeth.

**Relapse:** After orthodontic treatment, it is important to wear the retainers as instructed by your orthodontist. If retainers are not worn as instructed, the teeth can move, and this may lead to the need for further orthodontic retreatment as an adult.



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## When is orthodontic treatment an option?

Orthodontic treatment is an option for most adults with crooked teeth or uneven bites, just as it is for children and teenagers. Some of the most common situations where orthodontic treatment might be considered in adults are:

- Crowded, crooked or misplaced teeth
- Protruding teeth
- Underbite or overbite
- Jaws and teeth that are out of proportion to the rest of the face
- Excessive spacing between the teeth
- Realignment of the teeth prior to the placement of veneers, crowns or implants.

It's also important to remember you don't need a referral from a dentist to visit an orthodontist however, it is imperative that your dental health and gum health is excellent before starting any treatment with an orthodontist.

You can [find your nearest orthodontist](#) on our website.

## What are the benefits of orthodontic treatment?

There are plenty of psychological benefits to undergoing orthodontic treatment, with patients often reporting a boost in their self-confidence. Having a healthy, beautiful smile can give you assurance in your professional life as much as in your personal life, equipping you with the confidence you need for success, whether you're in a boardroom or on a first date.

In addition to psychological benefits, having straight teeth makes them easier to clean, reducing the chances of tooth decay and gum problems.

In conjunction with other medical and dental specialists, an orthodontist can also help in the diagnosis and management of obstructive sleep apnoea, and jaw joint problems.



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## Adult orthodontic treatment options.

When it comes to undertaking orthodontic treatment as an adult, there are plenty of options to suit all needs and budgets.

Your orthodontist can provide personal advice tailored to your situation, but here are some of the most popular orthodontic treatment options that are suitable for adult patients.



**Clear Aligners (Invisalign)**

Clear aligners, such as Invisalign, are one of the most popular options for adults looking to undergo orthodontic treatment. They are transparent pieces of custom-moulded plastic that sit over the teeth and gradually shift the teeth over time. This effective and simple solution offers optimal comfort throughout treatment and is gentle on teeth and gums. Obtaining excellent treatment results with aligners can be tricky and requires an experienced operator. Just like other forms of treatment, clear aligners should be fitted by a qualified orthodontist, who is fully trained to provide you with the best result.



**Lingual (inside) Braces**

Lingual braces function like traditional braces but are bonded to the back of your teeth instead of to the front, so no one will be able to see them! Lingual braces are usually more expensive and can take longer to fit and adjust than regular braces, but if you're looking for a discreet treatment option then lingual braces are definitely worth considering.



**Braces**

Braces have changed a lot over the years! Gone are the days where the only option was chunky metal braces. Modern tooth coloured/clear ceramic braces are still visible but are very subtle. Also, advances in orthodontic technology mean that the braces are now significantly smaller and more comfortable than they were in the past. They're also the cheapest option out there, so if you're looking for a cost-effective fix then braces might be a good choice.

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## How much does treatment cost?

It's one of the first things most people want to know – how much does orthodontic treatment actually cost?

Without an initial consultation, it's near impossible to determine the cost of orthodontic treatment. Each case differs from one to the next, and there's no 'one size fits all' price.

That said, when it comes to braces, anywhere between \$5,000 and \$9,000 for a standard 18-month treatment plan for upper and lower braces can be expected. More aesthetically pleasing treatment options, such as lingual braces and clear aligners cost more to manufacture and therefore can cost more for the patient.

However this depends on the length of your treatment plan and what problems are being corrected.

If you have health insurance you may be entitled to claim a portion of the treatment cost back from your health fund, but because every case is different, it's important to check with your fund prior to starting treatment.

It's also worth talking with your orthodontist about what payment plans are available, as most orthodontic practices allow patients to pay off their treatment in instalments over the duration of the treatment.



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## What to expect during your orthodontic consultation.

Your first orthodontic consultation is your first step towards achieving a beautiful smile.

During your consultation, a member of the orthodontic practice will take x-rays, photographs and digital scans (or plaster moulds) of your teeth.

These will be given to the orthodontist to evaluate and share with you in the second part of your consultation.

You'll also meet your orthodontist and have the chance to address any concerns you may have before they assess your teeth, gums, facial shape and bite. Your orthodontist will then be able to discuss whether treatment is needed, and all the options that are most suitable for you.

An orthodontic appointment generally takes 30 – 60 minutes and we recommend booking well in advance.



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## Tips for living with braces or aligners.

For the best results possible, you should maintain excellent oral hygiene throughout treatment, follow instructions about your orthodontic dietary requirements and

continue to wear your retainer once treatment is complete. You can still enjoy many of your favourite foods and activities with braces or aligners, all it takes is a little pre planning...

### Food

If you're wearing aligners, you'll need to remove them to eat and brush them. You can only remove them for a maximum of two hours each day, so you might find it helps to plan your meals.

If you've chosen braces or lingual braces, then after you have them fitted and adjusted it's a good idea to have some soft, [braces-friendly foods](#) at home.

### Sport

While you're wearing braces or aligners, you can still participate in your favourite sports as long as you make sure to protect your teeth where necessary. If you play a sport that usually requires you to wear a mouthguard, you'll still need to wear a mouthguard. If required, these can be fitted over braces quite easily.

### Hygiene

Brushing and flossing are very important parts of your oral health routine, and you should continue regardless of whether you're wearing braces or aligners.

If you find flossing with braces difficult, consider investing in an inexpensive orthodontic floss threader, available in nearly any store selling toothbrushes and toothpaste. Small interdental brushes are also useful for cleaning between the teeth.

For optimum care and treatment outcomes, as well as ongoing dental health, you should continue to see your general dentist regularly throughout your orthodontic treatment.



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## Over to you.

This e-book is designed as a guide to help adult patients navigate the orthodontic journey ahead of them. We hope we've been able to answer some of your questions.

Orthodontic treatment is an overwhelmingly positive investment in your future health and happiness. A confident smile has the potential to be your best and most memorable asset.

When it comes to treatment options and payment plans, your orthodontist will happily talk you through your options, answer any questions and do all they can to ensure you're comfortable moving forward.

If you're unsure of where to find a registered orthodontist near you, check the [Find An Orthodontist tool](#) on the ASO website.





Australian Society  
of Orthodontists

The Australian Society of Orthodontists (ASO) is the peak body for Orthodontists and orthodontic knowledge across Australia.

Orthodontics Australia by the ASO, is the ASO's public information and advice channel. Our blog and social media platforms have been designed to assist your research efforts and help you understand the difference between an orthodontist and a dentist, your orthodontic treatment options, the results you can expect and the journey along the way.

Of course, we can help you find registered orthodontists too with no referral needed! We hope you find this resource helpful and it gives you the confidence to take the next step in achieving the smile you've always wanted.

- Visit [aso.org.au](https://aso.org.au) for more information.
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