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TIMING OF TREATMENT

Revised 1-96

One of the most perplexing questions for parents and dentists is when kids should first see the orthodontist and when treatment should be started.

As a rule, we cannot do all that is necessary orthodontically until all the adult teeth have arrived, usually around the dental age of 12. Kids get to dental age 12 as early as chronological age 10 and as late as their mid-teens. Occasionally, adult tooth treatment could be started except for the presence of one or more persistent baby teeth, which are then removed in order to enable adult tooth treatment to begin.

Sometimes, it is important to begin treatment quite a while before all the adult teeth are in. This is often best in cases of more severe crowding or growth or bite problems (overbite, underbite, crossbite, etc.).

Many orthodontists like to see kids early, even if they only put them on recall to start later. Still other times, we will order the removal of baby teeth which are in the way of adult teeth coming in.

If we do decide on early treatment (before the adult teeth are all in) it will usually consist of simple appliances over a year or so, followed by a resting period while waiting for more teeth to come in. Many times, there are things which must be done early so that treatment will work out best.

Occasionally, parents want to have early treatment done in the hopes that adult dentition full braces will not be necessary. This is very difficult to predict. Usually it is best to say that early treatment adds to the overall cost of treatment, and the decision to start early needs to be made thoughtfully and on an individual basis.

Sometimes starting early can make the difference between extraction and non-extraction (of adult bicuspid teeth). One thing for sure, early treatment will add to the length and cost of orthodontic treatment, so its use must be chosen carefully.