

Pointers For Parents

Facing Up To A Troubling Habit: Thumb-Sucking

(NAPSA)—These commonly asked questions about how thumb- and finger-sucking can affect a child's teeth will let parents know that such problems may be corrected with orthodontic treatment.

Q. At what age should a child be seen by an orthodontist?

A. All children should have a checkup with an orthodontist no later than age 7. An orthodontist can detect orthodontic problems due to oral habits at this checkup. Treatment to correct an oral habit such as thumb- or finger-sucking may intercept the development of a problem and may make treatment at a later age shorter or less complicated.

Q. How is the problem usually corrected?

A. Problems caused by an active thumb-sucking habit can be corrected through appliances such as a tongue crib or a palate expander. Consult your orthodontist for information about a particular child's correction.

Q. How long does the correction take?

A. It can take as little as a few months. The patient will wear a retainer for a time following this correction.

Q. Will the patient require further orthodontic treatment?

A. After the permanent teeth come in, full braces may need to be placed to fully align teeth.



These photos show improvement in a thumb-sucker's bite after a short course of interceptive orthodontic treatment. Later comprehensive treatment will fully align the teeth.

Parents interested in additional information on orthodontic treatment may obtain a free video, "A Smile That's Good for Life," by calling the American Association of Orthodontists' (AAO) toll-free information line 1-800-STRAIGHT (1-800-787-2444). The video may also be viewed online at www.braces.org in the "Want a Beautiful Smile" section.

Orthodontists are dental specialists concerned with the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of dental and facial irregularities. Orthodontists graduate from dental school, then further their education with two to three years of university-based training in an orthodontic residency program. Only those who have completed this education may call themselves "orthodontists," and only orthodontists may be members of the AAO.

For more information about orthodontic treatment for children and adults, visit www.braces.org.