



Invisalign vs Braces

A guide for busy parents.

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Braces vs Invisalign: 6 things you need to understand before making the choice.

You have likely heard about aligners. They have been around for about 20 years, are becoming more popular, and the companies which produce them (Invisalign being the most prominent) are becoming more visible.

Aligners are less visually intrusive and have no wires or metal brackets.

But despite their apparent advantages, did you know that most orthodontists have approximately 20% or less of their patients in aligners. Why is this? are they right for you or your teen? There are six things you should understand before making the choice.

How do they work?

Aligners and braces work on our teeth in completely different ways. In short - aligners push, and braces pull your teeth into the right position.



Aligners

- » Push teeth into position.
- » Small, white, round and square shaped bumps are fixed onto your teeth called "attachments". A thin plastic mouthguard (the aligner) engages into these bumps.
- » Each aligner triggers pre-programmed incremental movements for every tooth (e.g. it may be set to cause a 2 degree rotation on one tooth and 1mm movement on another).
- » These incremental movements are planned by your orthodontist.
- » Each aligner is usually worn for two weeks before being replaced (you normally get given a set of between 6-10 aligners to move through yourself between checkup appointments).
- » Your orthodontist may also get your teeth to move by getting you to wear elastic bands from your upper to your lower aligner. The aligners have small cutouts for the elastics and sometimes small buttons are glued onto the teeth as well for the elastics to connect to.





















Braces

- » Pull teeth into position.
- » Brackets are glued onto the teeth. A wire sits in the middle of the brackets and is held in by "O rings" or little metal gates.
- » The braces work by continually pulling your teeth towards the shape of the wire.
- » Your orthodontist tweaks the movement of your teeth by either changing the wire for one with a different shape, bending the wire or by changing the "O rings" and/or chain (continuous O rings) that are placed on your braces every 6 weeks or so when you go into the clinic for your regular checkup.
- » Your orthodontist may also get your teeth to move by getting you to wear elastic bands from your upper to your lower braces. These are worn from hooks that are part of the bracket.

What are they used for?

A patient usually has a combination of the orthodontic issues set out below. However, there are limitations on what aligners can do and this will often dictate whether your orthodontist assesses them to be a suitable treatment option for you or your child. Braces tend to be the preferred option for more significant orthodontic issues.

| Issue | Aligners | Aligners | Braces |
|---|--|---|---|
|  <p>Open bite</p> | <p>Because aligners push the back teeth towards the gum, they are particularly good at correcting an open bite.</p> <p>Braces are good also, but they have a natural tendency to open bites. Often elastic bands are needed to counteract this.</p> |  |  |
|  <p>Over bite</p> | <p>Aligners are only able to correct some overbites. Braces on the other hand can correct most overbites.</p> |  |  |
|  <p>I just want generally straighter teeth</p> | <p>Aligners and braces can straighten most mild crowding of teeth.</p> |  |  |
|  <p>Overly crowded</p> | <p>Braces on the other hand, are great for very crowded and rotated teeth.</p> <p>When teeth are really rotated or extractions are needed, aligners are not great at correcting these. Braces are often used first to get things straighter before doing aligners.</p> |  |  |
|  <p>Crossbite</p> | <p>Braces are better at correcting more significant crossbites. Additional things like mouth stretchers are needed first, for more severe crossbites, for both braces and aligners.</p> |  |  |
|  <p>Gapped teeth</p> | <p>Aligners and braces are both good at correcting gapped teeth. However, braces are better.</p> |  |  |

Scale

Excellent



Good



Not so great



Pain/Discomfort

It is relatively common for a patient to experience some pain during orthodontic treatment.

- So what actually causes the pain?
- A tooth is held connected to the bone by little bungee chords called tooth ligaments.
- When a tooth is pushed or pulled, some of these tooth ligaments are stretched and some are squashed.
- These squashed and stretched ligaments release pain and inflammatory markers, which cause the nerve endings in the area to fire.
- The peak of discomfort, is usually 24 hours after getting braces or aligners put on.
- This pain often disappears after 7 days as your tooth starts to move and the pressure on the tooth ligaments is relieved.

Is there a difference between braces and aligners?

The research suggests pain can be slightly higher in the first few days after having your braces put on. However, after this, the discomfort is about the same.

Eating

Probably one of the most common questions that orthodontists get asked, is what can I eat? Or, what can my teen eat? Let's face it, two years is a really long time.

| | Aligners | Braces |
|------------------------|--|--|
| How do you eat? | » You take them out to eat! | » They are stuck onto the teeth and cannot be removed. |
| Problems? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">» If you love to snack that's going to be a lot of taking aligners out and remembering to put them back in.» Aligners have to be worn for at least 22 hours per day or they don't work!» One of the biggest issues we have with use of aligners is people taking them out and either forgetting or intentionally not putting them back in. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">» The first week after getting braces is usually the hardest as you or your child learns what they can and can't eat.» Hard sticky crunchy foods are the biggest issue as they can lead to a bracket coming off the tooth, i.e. a broken bracket.» Usually teenagers learn pretty quickly what they can eat. |

Brushing/Keeping clean

We all know that brushing our teeth is important to remove the plaque (gooey mix of bacteria and food that sits on our teeth) which causes holes. This becomes even more important when you or your teen has braces, as there are so many more places that the food and bacteria can attach.

You have to spend a bit longer brushing and flossing your teeth when you have braces. Your orthodontist will usually give you a pack, including a toothbrush specifically designed to brush around braces, special orthodontic floss and toothpaste to make this process a little easier. With aligners, it is easier to brush and floss your teeth, but you can still get holes around the attachments if you don't look after your teeth.

Cost!

The cost between braces and Invisalign aligners varies. The cost of the raw materials which are placed on your teeth for aligners and the software used is fixed by the manufacturer (e.g. Invisalign) and is normally much higher than that for normal braces. However in minor cases we have the 3D technology to scan the teeth and 3D print models for the aligners. We are also consultants for aligner companies and get preferential pricing.