

Will Your Child Need Braces?

Ugly Betty's tin grin may be totally goofy, but braces are actually cooler-looking—and more effective—than when you were a kid. Braces now work faster and kids are less likely to have teeth pulled, says Raymond George Sr., D.M.D., a spokesperson for the American Association of Orthodontists. The latest facts may surprise you.

»Your child should have an orthodontic checkup by age 7. By examining his mouth while he still has baby teeth, an orthodontist can identify problems with his jaw growth or tooth alignment that can be prevented or fixed. Although some general dentists offer braces, it's best to go to an orthodontist, who's had advanced specialty training. To find one near you, go to braces.org.

»You can't necessarily see that your child needs braces. About 45 percent of kids need braces to fix functional problems, such as a misaligned bite, but up to 75 percent could benefit from them to straighten their teeth and improve the shape of their face. Some reasons

why your child should definitely see an orthodontist: He has trouble chewing or biting; he lost his baby teeth early or late; he breathes mostly through his mouth; he sucks his thumb or fingers; his jaws make sounds; his top and bottom teeth touch at an unusual angle or not at all; or his teeth seem out of proportion with his face.

»It may be a two-step process. For some kids, the best approach is to have a first phase of treatment before all their big teeth come in. For example, if your child's mouth is too small to fit all of her teeth, the orthodontist might advise a palatal expander, an appliance that helps widen her upper jaw so she won't need teeth pulled. When all her big teeth come

in, she can get braces.

»They look and feel better. More orthodontists are using a new type of braces called the Damon System. They have thin wires with shape memory and small brackets that don't require elastics. "These braces put much less pressure on teeth, so kids don't have as much soreness," says Frank Bogdan, D.M.D., assistant clinical professor at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, in Newark. "They also work faster because the lighter force increases blood flow to the bone and tissues." To see whether there's an orthodontist using them in your area, go to damonbraces.com.

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