



# Orthodontics for Adults

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**the why, how,  
who and where**

The British Orthodontic Society Guide

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## the why, how, who and where

Never before have there been so many ways to have your teeth straightened. Making the right decision is important.

The British Orthodontic Society has created this guide to help you navigate your options and choose the right treatment for you.

Orthodontics isn't simply about straight teeth but can make a difference to your appearance, your bite and your overall oral health. It's a specialty which blends science and art.

# Why?

The reasons for wanting straight teeth in adult life are many and varied, particularly as teeth can become more crowded or move with age. Other reasons might be that you:

- had orthodontic treatment when younger but stopped wearing the retainers
- had some gum problems and so your teeth have become loose and moved
- need a dental implant and space needs to be created
- simply want to improve your smile
- you may have seen advertising that's made you aware that orthodontic treatment in adults is possible

Teeth-straightening is not just about appearance - it can be about function too. By this we mean the way you bite and chew.

# How?

Braces today come in many different shapes, materials and sizes. In general, no brace is predictably quicker. Each of the three broad categories has advantages and disadvantages to consider.

## **Traditional fixed braces (train tracks)**

Tried and tested over many years, traditional brackets and wires are very effective systems for moving teeth. They come in different styles for both the back and the front of the teeth with minor variations in design and appearance. Today there are less visible options which feature clear brackets or braces placed behind the teeth (lingual braces).

## **Removable clear aligners**

These mouth guard style aligners are individually made for you and your teeth. You are given a new aligner every few weeks to gradually move your teeth into a new position.

## **Orthognathic treatment**

For a small group of adults, braces alone will not achieve the improvement they need and they will also undergo surgery to change the position of the jaws.

# Where?

You could have your treatment in a practice or a hospital, depending on your needs or choice of clinician. You will need a referral to a hospital but can choose the practice where you want to have treatment.

You are advised to seek reassurance that your provider has the necessary skill and experience. If you are unsure, you can always seek a second opinion.

## Key point

If you have lived with crooked teeth for most of your life, other problems may have arisen such as wear caused by badly positioned teeth. This will need treating by your dentist once the teeth have been straightened

## Key points

- In recent years there has been a growth in quick and short term orthodontic techniques which tend to focus on fast results but with limited objectives. The intention may be to improve the smile only, without giving equal emphasis to the bite and function.
- Before your treatment starts, ensure you are completely clear about what can and cannot be achieved. It's important to understand how your bite may be affected if the treatment concentrates on your smile only.
- The risks of treatment should always be explained. The BOS has more information on its website.

# Who?

## Who provides orthodontic treatment?

- Most treatments are provided by specialist orthodontists or dentists in practice
- Specialist orthodontists are dentists with at least three years of additional training. They work in hospital, in practice and in the community
- Complex cases, particularly those requiring surgery, are often referred to a consultant orthodontist in hospital

While all dentists can provide orthodontic treatment, many choose to refer their patients to a specialist orthodontist or a dentist with recognised enhanced skills. Their advanced training is important for diagnosis and also for identifying complex cases or dealing with unexpected developments that can occur during treatment.

### Tips:

- Explain your expectations of treatment to your provider
- Ask if the provider offers a range of choices for orthodontic treatment
- Ask how many cases the clinician has carried out
- Be wary of quick solutions to potentially complex problems
- If a treatment seems high on marketing promise, it might be worth getting a second opinion
- It's better to have no treatment rather than poor treatment

Choosing the best clinician to meet your needs is more important than your choice of orthodontic technique. To help you find the right clinician, the BOS has produced a video which suggests good questions to ask. These questions are:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of treatment?
- What would happen if I decide not to have treatment?
- What kind of treatment do you recommend?
- Is there an alternative treatment?
- How many cases have you treated?

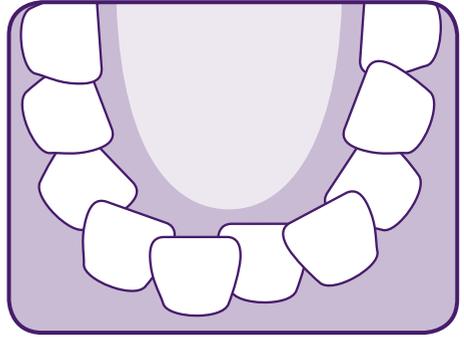
You can view the video here:  
[www.bos.org.uk/adultorthodontics](http://www.bos.org.uk/adultorthodontics)

# What?

## Crowded teeth

With nearly 45% of people in the UK having a degree of crowding, this is the most common reason for adults to embark on treatment. In some cases, extractions are necessary to create space to align the teeth.

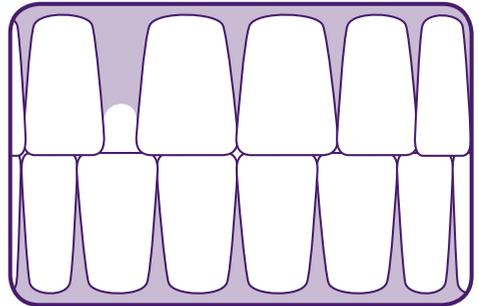
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## Gappy teeth

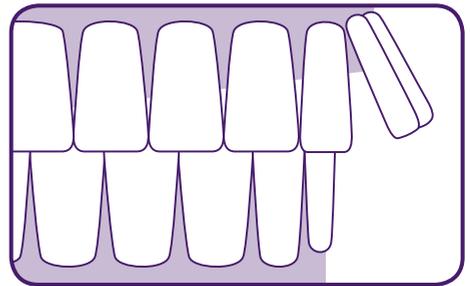
Gaps can occur for many reasons such as larger than average jaws or having smaller than average teeth. In some cases, adult teeth don't come through and this leaves spaces in the mouth.

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## Sticking out teeth

Another common problem in the UK is having a lower jaw which is positioned too far back, making the upper teeth appear to stick out. Upper teeth can also lean forward.

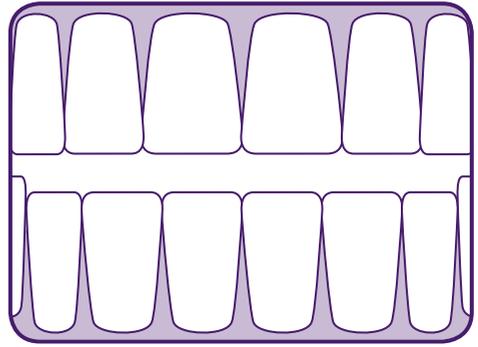


## Open bite

### Upper and lower teeth not meeting at the front

Very often the appearance is less of a concern while difficulty in biting food, such as apples, is more of an issue. Surprisingly, an open bite is a complex problem to treat and may require jaw surgery.

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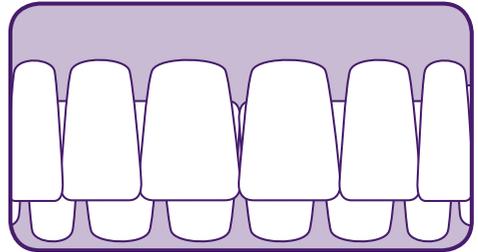


## Deep bite

### Upper teeth closing too far over the lower teeth

When your upper teeth close too far over the lower teeth, damage can occur. The lower teeth biting into the back of the upper teeth may lead to wear and potentially damage to the gums. Some people with a deep bite also have front teeth which lean inwards.

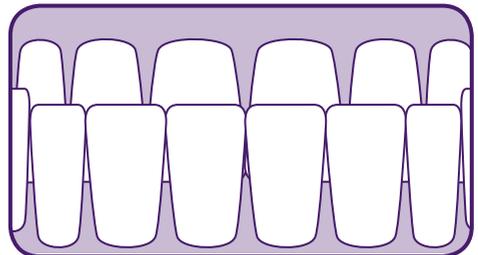
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## Crossbite

### Upper teeth closing behind lower teeth

Not only can a crossbite create an asymmetrical smile, it can make eating more challenging because there is no natural bite. The teeth can meet awkwardly, causing damage or wear to the tips of the teeth. In severe cases braces and jaw surgery (orthognathic treatment) may be required.



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