

Healthy You

FAST FACTS FOR YOUR HEALTH

Q&A with Dr. Jeff: Clear Aligners or Metal Braces?

Being proud of your smile is important, and you have options to boost your confidence. But more options brings more questions. Fortunately, Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin, Vice-President and Dental Director for Delta Dental of Iowa, shares an expert take on what to consider if you're thinking of straightening your teeth.

Q: What are the top benefits of metal braces? Drawbacks?

Dr. Chaffin: The top benefit of metal braces is that they are more effective for severe overcrowding. The dentist controls the force put on teeth with metal braces and can slowly move teeth. Additionally, metal braces cannot be removed, which ensures that the treatment is being followed and that patients won't remove them when "out of sight."

The biggest drawbacks of metal braces are their appearance and the ability to clean the teeth thoroughly. For an adult, metal braces may present a cosmetic issue that they are not willing to go through, whereas that same issue may not be a big deal for children and teens, since many of their peers wear metal braces as well.

Q: What are the top benefits of clear aligners? Drawbacks?

Dr. Chaffin: The overall top benefit is cosmetics — the aligners are clear and don't present the same cosmetic issues that metal braces do, as the aligners are close to invisible. Another advantage is the ability to remove the aligner and thoroughly clean the teeth and gums, as food doesn't get stuck in the metal brackets.

The downsides are that patients can lose the aligner or fail to wear the aligners full time, which can add additional cost and extend treatment times. Overall, aligners tend to be more expensive than metal brackets as well.

Q: When it comes to choosing between treatments, how much does age play a role?

Dr. Chaffin: The biggest decision in a metal brace versus a clear aligner is related to the diagnosis by the dentist. Very complex and severe tooth crowding may rule out clear aligners as an option. For less severe crowding, the treatment success is similar for the clear aligners and metal braces. Both children and adults could be good candidates for clear aligners, but the compliance factor (actually wearing the aligners full time) tends to be more of a problem with children and teens.

Q: Does my Delta Dental of Iowa insurance cover both clear aligners and metal braces?

Dr. Chaffin: For those with Delta Dental of Iowa insurance that covers orthodontics (braces), both clear aligners and metal braces are covered. It's important to note that benefits only cover orthodontics provided by a licensed dentist. If you have any coverage questions, just give Delta Dental of Iowa's Customer Service a call or reach out online.

Q: Are some patients not good candidates for clear aligners or metal braces?

Dr. Chaffin: Anyone can wear metal braces, but two groups of people aren't good candidates for the clear aligners. The first group are those with severe tooth crowding, and the second group are those who struggle following a treatment plan, as you have flexibility to remove the aligners but need to wear them all day.

Q: Overall, do clear aligners straighten teeth as well as metal braces?

Dr. Chaffin: For routine orthodontic cases (that is, there is no severe tooth crowding), there is no difference in the outcome between the two methods.

Q: Is there anything else about weighing clear aligners versus metal braces that patients should understand before selecting a treatment?

Dr. Chaffin: I think you have to look at cost first — are clear aligners worth the additional money? Secondly, following the treatment plan is a huge issue since clear aligners are removable. If you are diligent and will wear the clear aligner full time, then the treatment can be successful. However, if there is a chance that you won't wear the clear aligner as much as you should, you may want to consider traditional metal braces to give you the best chance for success.

Oral Cancer and Older Adults: Know the Signs, Save Your Life

Oral cancers are a group of cancers that develop in or on your mouth (such as your tongue and lips) and throat. In 2018, nearly 400,000 Americans were living with oral cancer.¹

Age and gender play a role in your oral cancer risk. Men are twice as likely than women to have oral cancer,¹ and the average age most people diagnosed with oral cancers is 63.2 But there are some risk factors you can control, such as your smoking status and alcohol use — both of which contribute to your risk for developing oral cancers.

As you get older, it's especially important to stay on top of your health because your risk for many diseases increases with age. Fortunately, knowing the signs and symptoms of oral cancer will help identify disease in its earlier stages, when it's easiest to treat.

Oral Cancer Signs and Symptoms

Oral cancers may show several signs (a sign is something you can see) and symptoms (a symptom is something you feel); you may have many of them or just one.

Below are common signs and symptoms of oral cancer:

- Pain or numbness in the mouth or jaw that doesn't subside
- A sore, lump or a swollen area in or around the mouth, throat or neck that doesn't go away
- Patches of white or deep red inside the mouth (on the tongue or gums, for example)
- A sore throat that won't go away
- Changes in speaking or swallowing
- New pain or discomfort with dentures

If you experience any of these symptoms, the next course of action should be a call to your dentist.

Your Dental Exam Includes an Oral Cancer Screening

You may not realize it, but your dentist screens for oral cancers at your twice-yearly dental exams. Although you get a deep cleaning, these exams are primarily preventive in nature. So, your dentist is looking for problems when they're still small and new, so they're less invasive (and, therefore, less expensive) to treat.

There is not one single test for oral cancer, so your dentist or dental hygienist may use one or more options to screen you. He or she may gently touch around your mouth, neck and jaw to feel for lumps or swollen areas.

Some dental offices also use special devices (like a fluorescent light) and dyes that illuminate any areas that warrant a closer look by your dentist.

If your dentist sees something abnormal, he or she may take a sample of that tissue (called a biopsy) to test if the cells are cancerous or potentially precancerous.

Know the Signs + See Your Dentist = A Strong Prevention Strategy

When it comes to healthy aging, informing yourself and keeping in touch with your healthcare team are crucial. Your risk may increase as you get older, but knowing the signs and keeping your twice-yearly dental visits on the calendar are strong defenses against oral cancer.

REFERENCE:

1. <https://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/oralcav.html>
2. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer/about/key-statistics.html>

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- <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/detection.html>
- <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/signs-symptoms.html>
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