

# 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.

## **Marijuana and Oral Health**

Marijuana goes by many names and draws as many opinions. To some, it's a natural healing alternative to mainstream medication, but others view it as a criminal substance worthy of jail time. Here in Iowa, medical marijuana is legal to registered patients, but it's recreational use is illegal.<sup>1</sup>

As more states adopt policies that legalize marijuana, more adults are using it. In fact, a recent study showed that nearly half of adults — 49% — have tried marijuana, which is the highest rate on record.<sup>2</sup>

Marijuana is becoming more mainstream, so it's important to understand how it affects your body. Many people associate marijuana with smoking, but it can also be applied topically (as a body cream, for example) or consumed in food and beverage.

Some of the potential benefits of marijuana include easing stress and anxiety, reducing migraine symptoms and inflammation, improving sleep and even relieving chronic pain and chemotherapy side effects. People with epilepsy have also reported that marijuana helps them manage their condition.

But when it comes to your oral health, it's a different story.

## **Marijuana and Oral Health: Potential Problems to Understand**

Smoking marijuana, just like smoking cigarettes, is associated with poor oral health. Smoking marijuana is associated with higher rates of cavities, which researchers have linked to dry mouth, a common side effect of smoking. Research has also found that increased appetites from marijuana use lead to greater snack food consumption, which also causes cavities. When marijuana is consumed in a sticky candy, gummy or baked good, it can leave sugar sitting on your teeth that can cause cavities.

Marijuana is also linked to higher rates of gum disease, along with increasing swelling, pain, redness and irritation inside your mouth. Marijuana users also have a greater risk of developing oral cancers.

### **The Main Takeaway**

Marijuana is becoming more accepted in the United States as more states are legalizing it in both medicinal and recreational forms, so you shouldn't hide it from your dentist or doctor if they ask about drug use at your next appointment. More research is needed to understand marijuana's benefits and side effects, but keeping your doctor and dentist in the know will ensure you make the safest and healthiest decision for you.

### **REFERENCES**

- 1.<https://idph.iowa.gov/omc/For-Law-Enforcement-and-Public-Safety>
- 2.<https://news.gallup.com/poll/353645/nearly-half-adults-tried-marijuana.aspx>

### **SOURCE**

<https://www.ada.org/resources/research/science-and-research-institute/oral-health-topics/cannabis-oral-health-effects>