

What do I need to know before starting orthodontic treatment?

Agreeing to orthodontic treatment is a big commitment and means making some important decisions before saying 'yes'. To guide you, here are some important questions that you may want to ask about orthodontics before you begin your treatment journey.

Questions you should ask before saying 'yes' to orthodontic treatment



What are my expectations and goals of orthodontic treatment?



Who is the right practitioner for my orthodontic needs?



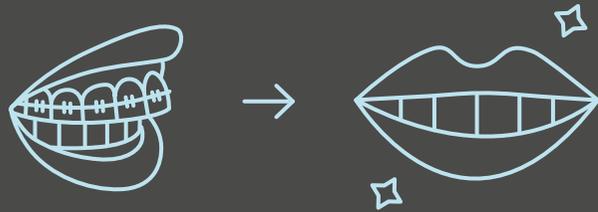
Do I fully understand my treatment options?



Can I seek a second opinion?



What can I do if I'm not happy with my treatment options or progress?



What are my expectations and goals of orthodontic treatment?

Do you know what you want to achieve when seeking orthodontic treatment?

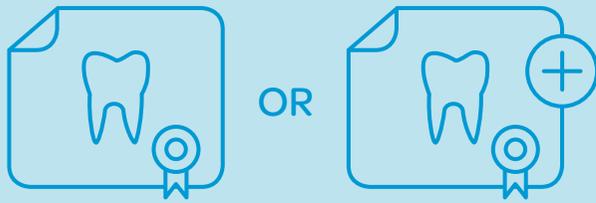
Orthodontic treatment aims to achieve ideal function and improved aesthetics. In other words, orthodontic treatment is not just about straightening teeth but also about making teeth bite together properly.

Whatever your reason for choosing to have orthodontic treatment, you need to be realistic about what can be achieved. You will need to talk to a practitioner about what is achievable and right for you.

You also may have ongoing maintenance requirements after your treatment is completed. Make sure you ask your practitioner about what you will need to do.

It is your practitioner's responsibility to explain their proposed treatment plan and discuss achievable and realistic goals for you.





Who is the right practitioner for my orthodontic needs?

In New Zealand, orthodontic treatment can be provided by dentists and specialist orthodontists.

Orthodontists are specialist dentists who have undertaken a postgraduate university degree in orthodontics. The specialist training usually involves completing a three year, accredited programme. This higher level education gives them the right to use the title 'orthodontist'. Orthodontists can undertake straightforward and complex orthodontic treatments.

Dentists can undertake straightforward orthodontic treatments. Some dentists have completed additional training to extend their knowledge in orthodontics. Dentists with an interest in orthodontics are different to orthodontists.

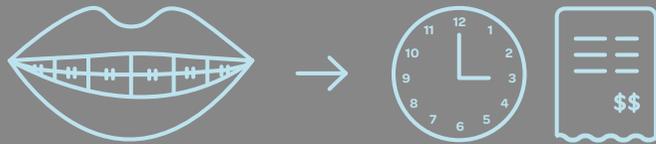
You may choose to undertake treatment with a general dentist or go directly to an orthodontist. However, if your treatment plan is complex or beyond your general dentist's training and experience in orthodontics, it is their responsibility to refer you to an orthodontist. This should happen before you agree to any treatment.

The Dental Council regulates all dental practitioners, including specialists such as orthodontists. Their website lists the names of all registered practitioners in New Zealand.

You can check the Dental Council website (www.dcnz.org.nz) to see whether your practitioner is registered as a dentist or a specialist orthodontist.

Ask your chosen practitioner about their qualifications and experience in orthodontics and think about how this fits with what you want to achieve.





Do I fully understand my treatment options?

It is your practitioner's responsibility to explain treatment options, costs and duration of treatment to you so that you can make the best choice. They should also explain potential risks or side effects. You should feel well informed and able to make the right choice for you. This is called informed consent.

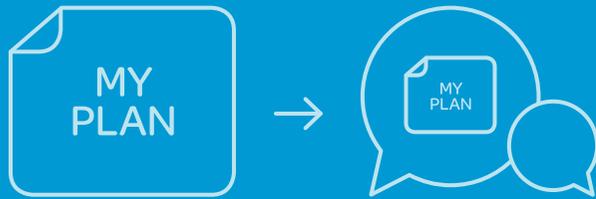
Take your time and carefully consider all your options when seeking orthodontic treatment.

Do not be afraid to ask your practitioner questions or to seek independent advice. Saying 'yes' to orthodontic treatment means you understand that the journey you are embarking on requires a time and financial commitment. This is not just during the active phases of treatment but also during maintenance following your treatment.

Sometimes your treatment plan may also include other dental treatments from your dentist or another dental specialist in addition to the orthodontics. This could include having some fillings placed before or after the treatment, having some teeth removed to make space, or other surgery along with the orthodontics. Make sure you understand what these could be, your options associated with these, and the additional cost.

It is important that you have realistic expectations of the process you are planning to undertake. Ask questions before and during your treatment to ensure that you and your practitioner remain aligned in goal and expectation. Sometimes orthodontic treatments do not go to plan. If this happens, your practitioner must keep you well informed so that you can choose the best alternative option from that point on.





Can I seek a second opinion?

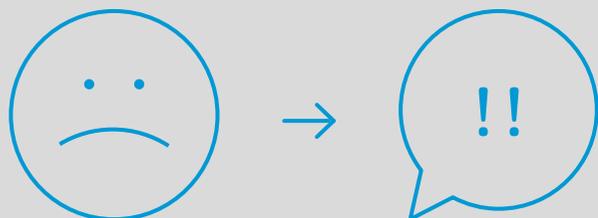
It is important that you feel confident and comfortable with the choices you have made. If you are in doubt, you can seek a second opinion from another practitioner before you start orthodontic treatment or at any time during treatment.

Second opinions can be obtained from any dentist who performs orthodontics or orthodontist of your choice who can offer advice or alternative treatment options.

You have a right to a copy of your orthodontic records. No practitioner may withhold these from you should you wish to use them for a second opinion.

Your records may include clinical notes, copies of correspondence, radiographs and records of financial transactions.





What can I do if I'm not happy with my treatment options or progress?

In New Zealand, all patients have the right to complain if they feel that harm has been caused or that they have received unsatisfactory treatment from any practitioner.

If you are not happy with the way your orthodontic treatment is progressing, or it is not meeting your goals, you should first talk to your practitioner about your concerns.

If your provider is unable or unwilling to fairly address your concerns, there are a number of avenues available to you.

You can seek support and advice via the Dental Council, the Health and Disability Commissioner's free advocacy service, or the professional association that represents your practitioner.

If you are unable to resolve your concerns, you can lay a complaint with the New Zealand Health and Disability Commissioner.

For further information on patient's rights and the complaints process, you can go to the Dental Council's website www.dcnz.org.nz or visit www.hdc.org.nz.

