

What Is Orthodontics?

By Dr. Chiann Fan Gibson

I recently had braces placed on my teeth by Dr. Gary Gruendeman, the orthodontist at Wheatland Dental. They were placed right after Thanksgiving and were recently removed several weeks ago.

As an adult, I realize that it's not easy wearing metal braces, even for just three months. I'm able to provide orthodontic services called "Invisalign" - the clear tray braces. Even so, I recently learned about a new system of braces called The Damon System of orthodontics, the type of braces Dr. Gruendeman placed in my mouth. Though I am not an orthodontic specialist, I am the curious type who wants to learn a little more to help the public understand the kinds of braces available.

What exactly is orthodontics? It is a specialty of dentistry that centers on the study and treatment of malocclusions, i.e. improper bites. It is a word derived from the Greek words ortho meaning straight and odons meaning tooth. Orthodontics can be very complex because a person's bite may be off due to the result of tooth irregularity, a disproportionate jaw relationship, or both. Orthodontic treatment is used to correct displaced teeth and for aesthetic reasons.

An orthodontist is a qualified dentist, who, after graduating from dental school, attends an additional two to three years of education in an accredited orthodontic residency program.

Braces are a combination of brackets and wires. Brackets are the part of the braces attached to the teeth. Braces require a wire called an archwire that connects the brackets and provides the forces to move the teeth in the proper direction. The most common type of braces are the metal fixed braces (fixed multibracket therapy) that are usually placed on the front of the teeth.

Adult patients may prefer other aesthetic braces options due to career situations or because they often speak publicly. Some patients may request the metal fixed braces to be placed on the back (lingual) tooth surface instead of the front. This allows you the benefit of correcting your problem without interfering with your appearance. Other individuals may consider the clear ceramic braces that are nearly invisible over the metal braces.

The Damon System is a newer and more innovative technique using a bracket technology, which gives more control and requires less friction than traditional brackets. What I noticed when I received the Damon System orthodontia was that the brackets were much smaller and more aesthetic. I was also informed that the Damon System takes only half the time to achieve results in comparison to the

traditional braces.

One of the great things about braces today is that you can have a multitude of colors to choose from with the elastics and appliances. Orthodontics has come a long way and the kids can have a little fun with color choices while in treatment.

Invisalign orthodontia (which I administer) also takes about half the amount of time to achieve results as traditional braces. Invisalign is not braces, but a clear type of orthodontics using trays. The trays are called "aligners" and do not use wires and brackets. Aligners are created using 3-D computer technology and the trays fit snugly over your teeth. The aligner trays are changed every two weeks and move your teeth millimeter by millimeter.

The greatest advantage of using Invisalign is that you can remove the aligners when you choose to eat, brush and floss, and are invisible to the eye. Your orthodontist will discuss the pros and cons of the different types of braces as well as which would be ideal for you.

As for orthodontic fees, they will vary with the complexity of the treatment and according to geographic region. Your orthodontist will provide you with the anticipated fees as well as payment options. Some insurance will have orthodontic benefits. Orthodontics is a great way to enhance a smile and achieve a more ideal functional bite.