

Will Straightening my Teeth Make me Feel Better Too?

Written by Keith R. Dobrin, DMD, MBA, ABO Board-Certified Orthodontist

Talk about a loaded question! I will start by saying this – the reason to pursue orthodontic treatment (including braces, Invisalign, expanders, etc) is NOT always 100% about esthetics. On occasion, a patient will present to our offices asking this question or something along these lines, whether for themselves or for their child. An easy answer would be YES, but why? There are many reasons to straighten improperly positioned teeth or fix a bite that is “off” which can positively impact your daily life. Let me take this question regarding straight teeth and feeling better and break it into 3 segments for better understanding as we develop a strong response to this interesting prompt: 1.) Function; 2.) Hygiene; 3.) Psychosocial.

1.) Function:

Often times patients will notice that something doesn't quite look right or they might be unhappy with the appearance or alignment of their teeth. However, there is also likely some underlying functional component that was overlooked. Is your bite/your child's bite uncomfortable? Is it awkward or unstable? Do you wake up in the morning with a sore or stiff jaw? Is chewing difficult? All of these questions are SUPER important when it comes to diagnosing a patient for orthodontic treatment and determining how the patient feels at their baseline.

The term malocclusion, or simply an improperly aligned bite, can be diagnosed and subdivided into multiple categories. For simplicity's sake I will provide details in laymen's terms as we make our way through the most relevant items without getting too technical.

An “underbite” is the rarest type of malocclusion, and has been determined to be the most difficult for chewing. In this type of bite, the lower teeth come out in front of the upper teeth. If this is evaluated and properly diagnosed at an early enough age, there is often an intervention that can either improve or resolve this condition. Interceptive or Phase I therapy has proven to be effective in treating an “underbite.” This type of treatment can include palatal expanders, braces, and bite turbos/adjustments to name a few.

The opposite bite often termed “overbite” in which there is excessive space between the forward position of the top teeth and back position of the bottom teeth is another type of malocclusion that requires correction. Believe it or not, teeth want proprioception – it's like they have a mind of their own! In these circumstances, teeth will continue to drift thus creating a curve of the entire arch of teeth (often the lower) which at one time might have been straight. Unfortunately, the teeth continue to drift even to the point where they hit the palate! Talk about uncomfortable. **BUT IT IS CORRECTABLE!**

Concluding this segment, I would say whole-heartedly that YES, straightening the teeth/bite for those with a functional issue will make you feel better.

2.) Hygiene:

We all know the drill (dental joke, couldn't help myself) when it comes to teeth, oral hygiene, and the dentist. As for straightening teeth and feeling better, this should come as a no-brainer. For those with a “regular” bite but plagued by crowded, spaced, or misaligned teeth, you can easily end up with difficulties maintaining proper oral hygiene. This includes a more

uncomfortable hygiene routine trying to access the hard-to-reach places, as well as a more time-consuming experience of brushing/flossing that often leads to less motivation and future neglect. Not to make matters worse, but your regular dental check-up and cleaning appointment may be more uncomfortable or take a longer time to complete when the dentist or hygienist has to hack away at all the tartar or staining that you couldn't quite reach. This may lead to a recommendation of a more frequent follow up (for example every 3-4 months instead every 6 months). We keep in close contact with our dental colleagues to make sure they advise patients in those scenarios to reach out for an orthodontic evaluation to avoid long-term consequences. Those can include but are not limited to inflammation of the gums, recession or loss of gum tissue, bone loss, and mobility of teeth. These devastating and dramatic consequences are not intended to scare you but more so to prepare you for what happens as we age when dental problems compound over time. There are solutions such as orthodontic treatment when it has been determined there is overcrowding present, for example. A thorough and comprehensive orthodontic diagnosis has proven to be worth your time if there is any question about the health and integrity of your teeth and the need for treatment. I would say we can comfortably check off the YES box for the "straight teeth and feeling better too" in the hygiene department.

3.) Psychosocial:

When evaluating whether straightening teeth can make you feel better, we must also consider the psychosocial impact of "feeling better." There is a vast amount of literature published in dental/orthodontic journals that evaluates and reviews how straight teeth correlates to perception in society, and the results are quite interesting. To start, just about every study confirms that there is a correlation between straight teeth and confidence. Going further, there is a perceived sense of success that people associate with straight teeth. Studies have even been published that show better scholastic performance in children or adolescents with straight teeth, which may or may not be directly related to confidence and self-esteem. We can delve much further into this subtopic, but take my word for it, the findings are eye-opening. Easy YES for the straight teeth and psychosocial combo.

At Bancroft Dobrin Orthodontics, we provide outstanding orthodontic care in a family-oriented, safe and comfortable setting with the most innovative equipment and materials in the orthodontic field. With the vast experience of our doctors, we can confidently say that YES – straightening your teeth will make you feel better too! Come visit us for a complimentary consultation and see for yourself!