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# PARENT HEALTH BULLETIN

**FEBRUARY 2010**

## WALLY CAT UPDATE



**Hello Wild Cub and Wild Cat Parents,**

As always, I would like to thank all of my wild cat and wild cub parents who allow their children to keep sending me emails.

I am so proud of all my smart and talented wild cat and wild cub friends. Parents if you have any suggestions or comments for Wally Cat, please feel free to email me at [wally.cat@uky.edu](mailto:wally.cat@uky.edu).

I hate to brag, but my wild cat and wild cub friends often comment on my beautiful, straight, and white teeth. When I was a younger wild cat, I had braces. In case you are thinking about getting braces for your child, below are the answers to some questions frequently asked by parents.

*Wally Cat*

## Common questions parents ask about braces

**What is orthodontics?**

Orthodontics is the branch of dentistry that specializes in the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of dental and facial irregularities. Braces are appliances or devices used to make these corrections.

**What is an Orthodontist?**

An orthodontist is a highly trained specialist who has completed two to three years of additional training after graduating from dental school.

**When should my child get examined for braces?**

The American Association of Orthodontists recommends an initial orthodontic screening by seven years of age. This is the time when the permanent teeth are growing in and the jaw has had enough growth to check for common problems.

**Why is “early treatment” recommended for some kids and not for others?**

Certain types of orthodontic problems can be fixed more easily at an early age, while other types of problems are best treated after all of the baby teeth are lost. The majority of orthodontic problems are treated in the preteen to early teen years.

**Continued on the back**

# *If you wait, orthodontic problems will almost always get worse.*

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

### Why would my child need braces?

Your child's health may be affected by poorly arranged teeth because they can break easily and trap bits of food causing tooth decay and gum disease. They can also lead to poor chewing and digestion which can be bad for their overall health such as:

- **Dental problems.** Crooked teeth are hard to clean. Kids with crooked teeth tend to have more cavities and gum problems than people who have had orthodontic treatment. Crooked teeth put extra stress on your child's teeth, gums, and jaw which can lead to additional problems.
- **Breathing problems.** As your child gets older the roof of the mouth can partially block the air passages in the nose. Treatment may help avoid this possibility.
- **Statistically, people who have had braces as children have a lower incidence of cardiovascular disease as adults.** Children who get braces learn good oral hygiene practices and that translates into a reduced risk for cardiovascular disease. There is also some recent data indicating that oral bacteria might play a direct role in cardiovascular disease by dissolving calcium in your child's mouth and depositing it into the arteries.

### What causes crooked teeth?

Just as we inherit eye color from our parents, mouth and jaw features are also inherited. Factors such as finger sucking, cavities, gum disease, trauma, and premature loss of baby teeth can also contribute to a bad bite.

### How do braces straighten crooked teeth?

Braces use steady, gentle pressure over time to move teeth into their proper positions. The brackets placed on the teeth and the main wire that connects them, are the two main components. The bracket is a piece of specially shaped metal or ceramic affixed to each tooth. The main wire is bent and threaded through the brackets and, as the wire tries to return to its original shape, it applies pressure to actually move the teeth.

### Could my child's bite get better on its own?

Usually it is just the opposite; if you wait, orthodontic problems will almost always get worse. If a few teeth are crooked or crowded, the orthodontist can realign the crowded teeth easily. Problems that may occur if orthodontic treatment is not received include:

- Teeth wear unevenly, leading to weak enamel and tooth loss
- Teeth are difficult to clean, leading to gum problems and eventual tooth loss
- Difficulty chewing
- Periodontal (or gum) problems as a person gets older

Also, chewing is the first step in digestion. If your child cannot chew food properly, the digestive system will not work as well. Stomach problems are very common in people who skip needed orthodontic treatment.

### What about Invisalign® Braces?

Invisalign aligners are part of a series of clear aligners used to straighten teeth. The Invisalign aligners are made after an orthodontist creates molds of your child's teeth and sends them to a lab. Computer technology is then used to create custom made clear aligners for your child. After your child is fitted for the first set of aligners, they will move up to the next set usually after about three weeks.

Keep in mind that not everyone can wear Invisaligns. The Invisalign system is for older teens and adults. They cannot be fitted if baby teeth remain. Also, the Invisalign system is designed for only certain tooth movements. Only an orthodontist can determine if your teenager is a candidate for Invisalign or would be a more appropriate candidate for metal braces or clear ceramic braces. Also keep in mind that Invisalign aligners can be much more expensive than metal braces.

#### SOURCES:

- UK College of Dentistry Office
- <http://www.braces.com/>
- Adapted from the December 2006 HEEL Health Bulletin

## PARENT HEALTH BULLETIN

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Written by: Travonia Brown-Hughes, Ph.D., MCH Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Kentucky HEEL program

Edited by: Connee Wheeler

Designed by: Rusty Manseau

Wally Cat and other cartoons by: Chris Ware (@ University of Kentucky)

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