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## *Orthodontic Facts*

### **What is Orthodontics?**

The specialty of orthodontics involves the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of dental and facial irregularities. The technical term for these problems is "*malocclusion*" which literally means "bad bite". The practice of orthodontics requires professional skill in the design, application, and control of corrective appliances (usually braces) to bring teeth, lips, and jaws into proper alignment, thereby achieving facial and dental balance. Orthodontics is a specialty degree that normally requires three years of additional training beyond four years of dental school. Membership into the American Association of Orthodontists, as signified by the emblem in the upper right, ensures that your doctor has had this additional training at an accredited University and therefore qualifies as an orthodontic specialist. Some specialists pursue a masters degree in addition to their post doctoral education and thus carry a *M.S.* (Masters in Science) with their title.

### **Why do Dental and Facial Irregularities Occur?**

Most malocclusions are inherited, but some are acquired. Inherited problems include crowding of teeth, too much space between teeth, extra or missing teeth, cleft palate, and a wide variety of irregularities of the jaws & face.

Acquired malocclusions can be caused by thumb or finger sucking, tongue thrusting, airway restriction by tonsils and/or adenoids (mouth breathing), dental disease, or premature loss of primary or permanent teeth. Whether inherited or acquired, many of these problems affect not only alignment of the teeth but facial appearance as well.

### **Why is Orthodontic Treatment Important?**

Crooked and crowded teeth are hard to clean and maintain. This may contribute to conditions which cause not only tooth decay, but eventual gum disease and possible tooth loss. Other orthodontic problems can cause abnormal/excess wear of tooth surfaces, excess stress on supporting bone and gum tissue, or misalignment of the jaw joints with resultant chronic headaches or pains in the face and/or neck.

Left untreated, a majority of orthodontic problems become worse. Treatment by a specialist to correct the original problem is often less costly in money and time than the additional dental care required to treat the more serious problems that can develop in later years.

The importance of an attractive smile cannot be underestimated. A pleasing appearance is a vital to one's self-confidence. A person's self-esteem often improves as the teeth, lips, and face come into harmony. Orthodontics can ultimately enhance your personal, social and career success.

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