



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **“Heavy Metal” a thing of the past in today’s orthodontics**

Now that children and teens are back in school, it’s time to consider their oral health. Brushing, flossing, good nutrition, annual check-ups and professional cleanings go a long way to keep teeth and gums healthy, but in some cases, families may need to brace themselves for braces.

The Alberta Dental Association + College advises parents to arrange for an orthodontic assessment by about age seven, shortly after the first permanent teeth begin to erupt. If a problem is detected, it may require treatment or monitoring by an orthodontist, a dental specialist who has completed a minimum of two to three years of full-time university training beyond dental school.

“Many orthodontic problems can be more easily corrected before the jaw has completed growth,” said Dr. Philip Williamson, a Calgary based orthodontist. “It’s sometimes more difficult to correct malocclusions in adults and they may require lengthier or more invasive treatment in conjunction with braces in order to achieve the desired results.”

Malocclusions cover a wide range of dental imperfections, functional and cosmetic. “Most commonly the patient has a problem with their alignment or bite,” says Williamson who is president of the Alberta Society of Orthodontists. “This can be caused by teeth that are too prominent, crowded together, crooked or misplaced. Parents should also watch for early or late loss of baby teeth, the late arrival or lack of permanent teeth, jaws that shift to one side or make noises, or difficulty in touching lips together.”

Ignoring the problem can have negative consequences, ranging from excessive tooth wear, loss of periodontal (bone and gum) support, joint problems and headaches to difficulties with chewing and biting. And the smile factor can’t be discounted either; self-esteem and confidence diminish when teeth affect appearance and that great smile.

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Some of the simpler problems, like teeth pushed forward by thumb-sucking or crowded teeth, should be monitored and can sometimes be resolved with minor dental procedures like removing baby teeth to make room for adult teeth or using removable appliances to guide the teeth into place. Many bite problems are best corrected during childhood. To finalize the bite and complete dental alignment, full braces are often used and are best applied when all the permanent teeth have emerged, usually about age 12.

“Today’s braces aren’t the torture devices they were when I was first in training,” says Dr. Jean-Louis Ares, an Edmonton based orthodontist who has practiced 42 years. “In those days, heavy metal was the norm. We had to put a metal ring around each tooth before the brace could be applied. Now we have lightweight brackets that stick to the enamel of the teeth and, for people concerned about their smile, we can put a clear ceramic bracket across the front teeth.”

“New technologies have revolutionized orthodontics,” he continued. “Self-ligating brackets have an opening closing clip, which make adjustments faster and pain free. Wires are lighter too and some are equipped with memory that activates in the mouth’s warmth. We’ve found over the years that all it usually takes to make the correction is a light, continuous force on the teeth.”

If a child or teen does need braces, the correction takes 18-24 months on average and the orthodontist makes adjustments every 6-8 weeks. For an adult, it could take 2-3 years. When the braces are removed, the patient will need a retainer full time for a short while and then nightly to maintain stability.

Though the school years are the best time for orthodontic work, dentists and orthodontists are seeing a growing number of adults coming for treatment and many insurance plans now cover adult orthodontics. “Though some of the work we do is functional, much of it is cosmetic,” said Dr. Ares. “Everyone wants the perfect Julia Roberts smile. It makes them feel good about themselves.”

For further information on oral health and orthodontics, talk to your dentist or an orthodontist, or go to these websites: Alberta Dental Association + College [www.abda.ab.ca](http://www.abda.ab.ca), Alberta Society of Orthodontists [www.asolink.com](http://www.asolink.com) or Canadian Association of Orthodontists [www.cao-aco.org](http://www.cao-aco.org).

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