

Key Items to Consider

When Selecting an Orthodontist

The key items to consider list is an educational tool to be used as a value –added resource to help patients and parents evaluate and compare orthodontic practices. With increased complexity of orthodontic treatment together with a number of treatment options you have one opportunity to get outstanding results. Making the right decision for your needs can be greatly enhanced by understanding and utilizing the following criteria in your selection process.

- 1. Review the qualifications of the doctor:** Treatment today requires a considerable amount of technical skill on the part of the doctor. Ask to see a biographical summary of the doctor's qualifications and experience in providing treatment. Is the doctor a specialist in orthodontics? All orthodontist are dentist first and continue their education to become specialized in a specific kind of dentistry - Orthodontics. Educational requirements for specialization in orthodontics requires a 3-4 year undergraduate college degree, followed by four years in dental school and an additional 2-3 years in a graduate program obtaining a Master of Science in Orthodontics. After practicing as an orthodontist for 10 years, an orthodontist can choose to become a Board Certified Orthodontist by completing a rigorous examination process and become a Diplomate of The American Board of Orthodontics a distinction that only 25% of American orthodontists have achieved.. Only 6% of practicing dentist are orthodontic specialists.
- 2. Review the qualifications of the staff:** The skill of the office staff is a critical component of your overall treatment success. You should ensure that your treatment coordinator and other office staff are experienced and qualified in the treatment of orthodontic patients. Are the orthodontic assistants Registered Dental Assistants/Registered Dental Hygienist? Ask to see biographical information on the staff, and ensure that you are dealing with an experienced group of professionals.
- 3. Ensure that the practice is up-to-date on the technology and techniques of the profession:** There have been significant advances in orthodontic treatment in recent years. Ask for an office tour and ask for a detailed explanation of what technology is utilized to deliver excellent results: Is the iTero Scanning system used for making models of teeth replacing taking impressions? Is the use of digital photography, digital x-ray including 3-D x-rays for diagnosing and treatment planning used? Are the proper sterilization techniques used and monitored. What technology does the office practice utilize to accelerate orthodontic treatment such as SureSmile and AcceleDent? Does the practice offer Invisalign, clear brackets, self-ligating brackets and indirect bonding for greater comfort during initial placement of brackets?
- 4. What is the philosophy of the orthodontist regarding extraction of teeth for making your teeth fit together properly?** In the past, extraction of teeth was more common in orthodontic treatment. Today extraction of your natural teeth is less common. Now, orthodontists utilize techniques to preserve the integrity of your smile and extractions are used as a last resort. There is really more to orthodontics than just making your teeth straight. How your teeth fit together, jaw function, and facial profile and appearance are all issues orthodontist are trained to consider.

5. **What is the orthodontist expertise in treating adults?** Is the orthodontist knowledgeable about TMJ function, periodontal issues as well as prosthetic replacement choices of any missing teeth. All of these can be complicating factors which should be taken into consideration in planning adult orthodontic treatment.

6. **What is the orthodontist philosophy regarding early treatment of younger patients?** Treating younger children may be recommended when skeletal issues are adversely affecting facial development. Skeletal issues can include retrusive lower jaw with protruding upper teeth, underbite, and crossbite. As a parent of young children you want to know and understand the advantage of starting treatment before all the permanent teeth have grown in.

7. **As a patient your time in orthodontic treatment is an important issue.** Weddings, reunions, graduations and other picture taking events may be reasons to consider accelerated treatment. Ask the practice what they offer, such as AcceleDent.

8. **Talk to former patients.** Ask for an extensive list of contacts, preferably with patients who had similar treatment needs. Your ability to contact people with similar cases, at your discretion, will ensure that you get an accurate picture of the practice capabilities regarding your situation.

9. **Will you be seen by the same doctor at each appointment?** Single doctor practices provide continuity of care by having the same doctor who diagnosed and planned the treatment will actually be doing the treatment.

Compare the technology and techniques used by the orthodontists. Remember however, that technology and techniques used by the orthodontist are only tools. The orthodontic results you receive are dependent on the education, knowledge, experience and expertise of the doctor who utilizes these techniques and technologies. Your investment is not in brackets and wires or clear aligners, but in the knowledge and expertise of the doctor and his clinical team. Is the diagnosis and treatment plan developed specifically for each patient's individual needs? Remember the orthodontist is asked to make decisions that can enhance or diminish the patient's facial appearance. Careful evaluation is needed in the selection of the orthodontist and team that will deliver your care and treatment.