

# 13 Questions to ask your Orthodontist:

Chicago and it's suburbs are lucky to have many Orthodontists to choose from. Some people do not know the difference between a Dentist and an Orthodontist. The differences between the two is becoming harder to see as many Dentists are starting to treat their patients using Invisalign and other tray aligner systems. I have seen a couple of patients who thought they were being treated by an Orthodontist, whereas they were being seen by their dentist – and were not happy with the results. Of course, Dentists can at times treat simple, basic cases with Invisalign but, as a whole, patients are overwhelming happier when being treated by an Orthodontist.

## 1.) Are you an orthodontist?

This is a very important question to ask your doctor, and one that could make a huge difference in the results of your smile. First, a dentist and orthodontist will likely have started their education in similar paths. Both will have a bachelor's degree and applied to dental school. After a four year doctoral program in Dental school, a general dentist may begin to practice dentistry, while an orthodontist must serve an additional three year residency in an accredited Orthodontics program. Ideally an Orthodontist, as Dr. Balakrishnan is, would also get board certified. Dr. Balakrishnan is board certified by the North Eastern Regional Board. Upon graduation, an orthodontist will typically tag his or her name with D.D.S. or D.M.D., as well as "M.S.", for Master of Science. In clinical terms, dentistry mainly deals with issues surrounding the gum and teeth, while orthodontists specialize in correcting the movement of teeth into their optimal position.

## **2.) How many patients do you treat with Invisalign?**

Invisalign by itself does not straighten your teeth. It is a plastic aligner that is designed by an orthodontist who has studied your case and identified the exact path for your teeth to move into their optimum position. Think of Invisalign as a car, and the doctor as your driver. As we know, there are all kinds of drivers out there. Do you want a doctor that only drives 5-10 times a year or one that races Formula 1? Another way to think of the comparison is: Invisalign is the paint and the Orthodontist is the artist. Would you like a paint-by-numbers piece of art hanging on your wall or would you like the “Mona Lisa”?

## **3.) What type of braces may I choose from?**

There are many treatment types that exist on the market. After your initial examination and evaluation, you may choose from Damon Braces, Damon Ceramic Braces, or Invisalign. Each treatment type has certain pros and cons associated with them, but overall, all can be quite effective in helping you achieve your desired outcome.

## **4.) What is “6 Month Smiles” or “Fastbraces”?**

### **Why wouldn't I just choose that?**

Six month smiles or Fastbraces are currently marketed as a cutting-edge technology that allegedly allows faster, safer movement of teeth – in as little 6 months using a triangular shaped bracket. If these were the best and safest treatment choice for a patient, I would recommend them highly. This type of treatment focuses on the 6 teeth that are visible when smiling. This treatment does not correct the entire mouth, bite mechanics, and jaw alignment. Plus, these “fast” treatments cost almost as much as comprehensive orthodontic treatment but, do not include complete treatment.

## **5.) How long do I have to wear braces?**

Orthodontic treatment takes anywhere from 12 to 24 months depending on the individual case as well as the compliance of the patient. Dr. Balakrishnan will be able to provide a more accurate length of treatment after your initial consultation.

## **6.) How many orthodontic visits are needed while in treatment?**

On average, you can expect to visit an Orthodontist every 4-6 weeks. While we enjoy and look forward to seeing you, Dr. Balakrishnan's patients only need to come every 8 weeks due to the type of braces that are used.

## **7.) Will extractions be needed?**

Depending on the patient, certain patients will need to have extractions to allow room for teeth to move into their correct positions. After evaluating your teeth and bite, Dr. Balakrishnan will let you know if extractions will be needed.

## **8.) What about oral hygiene?**

Keeping your teeth and gums clean is imperative to achieving the best results from your Orthodontic treatment. If you're wearing braces, you must brush after every meal. Also, there are special flossing instructions that can help you floss your teeth while wearing braces. If you're wearing Invisalign, you should not eat with the aligners in place, and continue to brush and floss normally. You should still see your Dentist for regular cleanings and check ups twice a year.

## **9.) Can someone with braces still play sports?**

Yes. You can still enjoy sports but, you will need to wear a special mouth guard that will protect your teeth, tongue, gums and cheeks in the event of a fall or contact.

### **10.) Do braces hurt?**

Overall, there should be minimal discomfort involved while in treatment. The only time you might feel a mild discomfort is following your check-ups or right after your braces are placed on your teeth. Over the counter pain relievers may be used.

### **11.) Will I need to wear a retainer?**

We recommend you wear a retainer following your treatment. The job of a retainer is to ensure that your teeth don't shift to their original position after being straightened, which will happen if you don't wear your retainer!

### **12.) What is the cost of braces or Invisalign?**

Downers Grove Orthodontics offers competitive pricing for treatment and never charges extra for Invisalign. Our staff will work with you to create a custom payment plan that fits your budget and one that puts you in control. If you have insurance that covers any portion of your orthodontic treatment, we will gladly file on your behalf.

### **13.) Are you related to a National Spelling Bee Champion?**

Dr. Balakrishnan is married to Dr. Balu Natarajan, an Internal/Sports Medicine/Hospice physician in Chicago. Dr. Natarajan also was the winner of the 1985 Scripps Spelling Bee. The first person of Indian descent and the only winner from Chicago. They reside in Hinsdale and have two children, Atman and Advaith.