

Tips for finding the right orthodontist for you

By Lisa Lee Freeman

Choosing an orthodontist to trust with your smile or your child's smile is an important decision. Not all doctors or finished smiles are created equal, and not every doctor uses the same treatment approaches. Like other important decisions, you should do your homework. Not only is the finished outcome something you should be happy with and have for the rest of your life, but your overall orthodontic experience should be something to smile about, too.

Here are some tips on finding the right credentialed orthodontist to meet your or your family's treatment needs, so you can be comfortable with your choice in doctors and their overall staff.

1. Do some online research to ensure you are an informed consumer of today's orthodontic treatment options, pros and cons, and the terminology.
2. Ask your dentist who he or she recommends.
3. Ask friends and family for recommendations if you know they were thrilled with their orthodontists and finished outcomes.
4. If you have dental insurance, see who is covered by your insurance plan in your area.
5. See what overlap exists between personal recommendations and the doctors covered by your insurance plan in your area.
6. Research websites, social media accounts and patient reviews of the doctors referred to you. Often you will be able to see finished cases (before and after images) they have done.
7. Consider education and experience. What kinds of education, continuing education, specialty training, teaching or expertise do they have? Are they board-certified by the American Association of Orthodontics?
8. If you have a specific treatment approach in mind, you will need to find an orthodontist who provides that specific brand of appliance (a particular clear aligner; a system that opens up the arch for a broad smile without shadows in the corners of the mouth, such as Damon; aesthetic options such as ceramic brackets, etc.).
9. If you have a finished smile that is your "ideal," you will need to take it with you to see if the orthodontist feels that smile is possible based on your situation.
10. Look at the AAO (American Association of Orthodontics) Doctor Locator site at <https://aaoinfo.org/locator>
11. If there is a particular treatment appliance you are interested in, you can look at the manufacturer website doctor locator to find an orthodontist in your area who does this type of treatment. An example is: <https://damonbraces.com> or <http://mysparksmile.com>
12. Set up a complimentary consultation with a couple of orthodontists who you found in your search.
 - Ask the right questions to make a well-informed decision.
 - Use an interview guide (see below) and add any of your own questions to it.
 - Discuss recommended approaches to and expected duration of treatment.
 - Discuss costs and insurance coverage.

Questions to ask potential orthodontists

1. What orthodontic issues do you see?
2. What treatment approach do you recommend and why?
3. How long do you expect my (or my child's) treatment to take?
4. How often will I (or my child) need office visits?
5. Do you recommend an alternative treatment? Why or why not? What would treatment time be with that? What are the cost differences? Do the number of office visits change?
6. What are the pros and cons of each treatment option?
7. Do you have before and after photos of patients who have had a similar issue and treatment approach?
8. If you have a finished smile that you really like, take it with you and ask the orthodontist, "Is this smile possible for me (or my child) based on my dental situation? What treatment was likely used to achieve this look?"
9. Who will be overseeing my treatment? How much time will be with the orthodontist versus assistants?
10. What are your office hours? Do you offer evening or weekend appointments?
11. How do you work with my insurance plan? What is my financial responsibility? How does that work over the duration of treatment?
12. What happens and what are the consequences of not doing treatment at this time?



About Lisa Lee Freeman

Lisa is a nationally known journalist and consumer advocate sought after for her insights and advice on consumer choices. She has made hundreds of appearances on the Today show, Good Morning America, and other national TV shows. She also has been a consumer correspondent for The Dr. Oz Show, a regular contributor to the nationally syndicated Scripps TV show, The List, a co-host of the Hot Shopping Tips podcast and the “Live Well for Less” columnist for AARP Bulletin.

Lisa was the founder and editor-in-chief of ShopSmart, a spinoff of Consumer Reports. The national magazine and website covered consumer news and buying advice on beauty, fashion, health care, food, travel, and more.