

Do you need to remove teeth for braces?

Deep Dive Information Sheet v3

Why do dentists do it sometimes? Why do dentists often not need to do it when it comes to adult braces or cosmetically focused braces? We have enlisted the help of Dr. Dan to explain the reasoning behind some teeth straightening treatments needing extractions and others not.

This question goes back to the two broad categories of straightening treatments and the difference between them. They are the comprehensive treatment approach which is what you would get if you visited an orthodontist or the cosmetic treatment approach which is what you get when you come to see the cosmetic dentists at Bamboo Cosmetic Dentistry in Cardiff.

Comprehensive Treatment Approach

Traditionally, straightening treatment can be a comprehensive orthodontic treatment. This is usually the treatment offered when going to your "normal" dentist. This approach has a dual purpose. There is a functional element to the treatment and also a cosmetic element to it. This approach will get the teeth biting and coming together nicely, in a "textbook" way. As a by-product of that, they will appear to be straight which is where the cosmetic benefit comes in.

And traditionally, this kind of treatment is imposed upon teenagers. As teenagers, they are still children and don't have much of a say in how their treatment progresses. Ultimately, it is deemed to be the best thing for them.

There are different styles of comprehensive treatment.

Teeth Straightening in the US & Europe

In the US and other parts of Europe, they take a much more holistic approach to straightening teeth. When the patients are growing, at a very early age, they'll intercept those growth spurts to encourage growth of the jaws. There are lots of benefits to that, but the main benefit is that the teeth will have space to grow into so if they are doing some straightening treatment on those kids later, they don't need to extract teeth to create space.

Comprehensive Treatment in the UK

In the UK, under the NHS, the style is of extracting teeth first and then dealing with the straightness afterwards, as well as the teeth coming together and looking good. Kids will be allowed to develop up to a certain age and then dentists will look at the teeth. They may then decide that there's not enough space, so they will take a couple of teeth out and straighten around it. The whole comprehensive teeth straightening process usually takes up to 18 months.

Adult Cosmetic Teeth Straightening

When adults come to Bamboo for teeth straightening treatment, they don't want to have lengthy treatment plans. Often, these adults are in their 20s and are suffering from relapsed tooth positions (for example when as kids, you stop wearing your retainers etc.).

Because they are adults, they have more of a say in how their treatment progresses. So, we will ask whether they have any functional issues, any issues biting together, any issues chewing, or any issues with pain in their jaw joint. 99% will have no issues functionally and are just concerned with the way their teeth look.

Therefore, we will consider a straightening option based solely around fixing the cosmetic issues (i.e. straightening the teeth you show when you smile). This is usually the top front 10 and bottom front 10 teeth (the teeth that are in front of the big molars).

As a result, if you're not moving molar teeth around then you're not really making any functional changes; and, if you're not making functional changes then you can get treatment times down to approximately 6 months on average with our Six Month Smiles treatment. Often it can be 5 months, occasionally it might take 7 or 8 months.

Because we're not making functional changes and patients are solely focussed on the cosmetic situation, we don't need to move teeth too far. If we don't need to move teeth too far then we don't need to take teeth out. Happy days!



Why don't we usually need to take teeth out at Bamboo?

Under a traditional extraction-based approach by an orthodontist, they usually have to take side teeth out (usually the pre-molars). And if they take one out, they have to take out the corresponding one on the other side as well; otherwise, there will be an imbalance of space available and the mid-line will shift over.

Now, if they take two teeth out, there will be 14mm of space available. That's a lot of space! For 99% of adults that come to Bamboo with cosmetic issues, we need to find about 4mm, maybe 5mm, of space. Not a lot in comparison. For cosmetic reasons, we can get away with moving teeth in a simple manner, and not too far; therefore, we don't need to take teeth out. The 4mm or 5mm of space (often less) that we need can happen in two ways.

The first option is to increase the circumference that the teeth sit in by rounding out the arch. This increases the space available for the teeth to sit in and often that is a positive thing, but it can also be a negative thing cosmetically. The second option is to contour the side teeth fractions of a millimetre progressively. This creates millimetres of space for the teeth to start moving into the desired spaces. This is partly what the monthly reviews are for. Our dentists will create space at each review, if needed, to allow the teeth to move progressively into position.

Summary

Adults don't really have a functional issue with how their teeth come together, so we don't need to move molars around. If there is sometimes 5 or 6mm of crowding, then we can straighten that without extracting teeth.

The exceptions

There are some instances, 1 case in every 100 where it is best for an adult to be approached with an extraction-based point of view, in a traditional comprehensive treatment plan. For those, we refer them to a specialist orthodontist because this is going to involve the back teeth and molars.

If we do need to take teeth out with a cosmetic orthodontic approach, it is always a lower front tooth. It is hard to increase the circumference of the lower teeth arch. Changing the bite of the lower teeth may result in being incorrect and uncomfortable with regards to the top teeth. So, to create space, we usually contour the side teeth as explained above, but if the space needed is the same as a bottom tooth taken out then we can do that without needing to contour.