

Two Phase Orthodontic Treatment

What is “Two Phase” Orthodontic Treatment?

The American Association of Orthodontics recommends that all children receive an orthodontic examination by 7 years of age. At this time, enough adult teeth have erupted and jaw growth has occurred that an orthodontist can identify current problems and anticipate future ones. Optimizing treatment times is of utmost importance for many patients. Two Phase orthodontic treatment involves staging orthodontic care so that it is performed during two separate times in a child's life. The major advantage of two phase therapy is the ability to redirect growth and development, expand jaws and align teeth so that a proper foundation is set for the remaining adult teeth. The main disadvantage of forgoing treatment until the teen or adult years is that it may create an unhealthy environment for the growth and development of the child's jaws, face, teeth and gums. Starting treatment after growth has slowed (or stopped) and all of the adult teeth have erupted may necessitate a more complex treatment plan sometimes involving tooth extractions and/or surgery. Oftentimes, compromised results have to be accepted.

What Are the Stages of “Two Phase” Treatment?

1. Phase I Treatment

Phase I Treatment typically begins when a child is between 7 to 9 years of age. Orthodontic appliances are usually anchored on the adult teeth and may include: braces on the front teeth and back molars, expanders, and possibly other appliances. Treatment time is usually 12 to 18 months.

2. Resting Phase

Between the two phases of treatment, retainers are worn (usually just at night when sleeping) to maintain the first phase treatment results and to allow the remaining permanent teeth to erupt unimpeded. During this time, periodic appointments for observation and retainer adjustments will be necessary, usually every 4 to 6 months.

3. Phase II Treatment

Phase II Treatment typically begins between the ages of 12 to 14, when all of the adult teeth have erupted. Between Phase I and Phase II Treatment, approximately 16 more adult teeth will erupt, so the main goal is to now align all teeth to maximize their appearance and function. Due to the improvements made in Phase I Treatment, Phase II Treatment often consists of straight-forward braces in an efficient period of time (usually 12 to 18 months).

