

Using Invisalign to Straighten Your Teeth

Invisalign is a trademarked name for a proprietary method of orthodontic therapy, developed by Align Technology, Inc. It is promoted as an "invisible" way of straightening teeth without using traditional braces, instead using a series of custom fabricated aligners designed using 3-D technology to gradually and sequentially move teeth to their desired positions. The principle behind the orthodontic tooth movement is based on Kesling's setup using the positioner.

The product initially met with resistance from many orthodontists who criticized the manufacturer for rushing the product into production, and concentrating too heavily on marketing at the expense of product quality. The company claims that preliminary issues have largely been remedied in the last several years. Now over 70% of all U.S. orthodontists are certified to treat patients using Invisalign.

The primary advantage of Invisalign is cosmetic; the aligners are difficult to detect, rather than invisible per se, and therefore has become particularly popular among adults who want to straighten their teeth without the unflattering look of traditional metal braces, commonly worn by children and adolescents, and therefore carrying the connotation of immaturity.

Another advantage over traditional braces is that the aligners can easily be removed for eating, and brushing teeth. The treatment typically requires fewer visits to an orthodontist, as well. However, Invisalign treatment is typically more costly than traditional braces, although the cost of treatment varies considerably.

Invisalign is not as effective as traditional fixed orthodontic appliances, and is unable to correct many orthodontic problems such as severe crowding, openbites, overbites, or underbites.

Treatment time can be longer using the Invisalign method rather than conventional orthodontic appliances, and the practitioner's ability to fine-tune the final result may be compromised by the limitations of its technology. In addition, being removable, the aligners are at risk of being lost or damaged, and they must be worn constantly to avoid delaying the treatment process. Because of this potential, many orthodontists never use this treatment for children or teenagers whose second molars (12-year molars) have not erupted.

These clear treatment retainers are most suitable for skeletal and dental Class I, mildly crowded orthodontic cases with good profile that normally can be treated with removable retainers. Compliance with these appliances is necessary, and the patient is expected to wear them for at least 20 hours per day.

Unlike traditional dental appliances, though, most patients are actually motivated to wear these appliances because of their superior esthetics. There is an advantage for patients using these appliances if they have periodontal or gum problems because, unlike appliances like braces, these removable appliances allow easy daily oral hygiene practices.

Extraction treatment using these appliances must be cautioned because root parallelism in the extraction sites are usually compromised and the periodontal outcome in the extraction site needs to be further studied. Certain types of tooth movements are also limited with these appliances, such as rotations of premolars and intrusion of incisors.

Generally, orthodontists can perform more complex movements and can supplement these clear retainers with a brief period of fixed appliances (traditional braces) to either attain complex tooth movements prior to starting or detailing the dentition at the conclusion of treatment. OrthoClear is a company that produces a rival brand of clear retainers for remedial tooth arrangement, established in 2005.

Disclaimer - The information presented here should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please talk to your dentist for more information about Invisalign.

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About the Author

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