



Orthodontic Records What They Are and What to Expect

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Making the decision to visit an orthodontist is a smart move. An orthodontist is expertly trained in the area of straightening teeth and, by making the choice to undergo treatment, you will reap a list of benefits. From having a beautiful, straight smile to helping to avoid jaw, chewing and even speech problems, orthodontic treatment can leave you both looking and feeling amazing. But what most people are not aware of is that all orthodontic treatment starts with a records process.

Taking Records

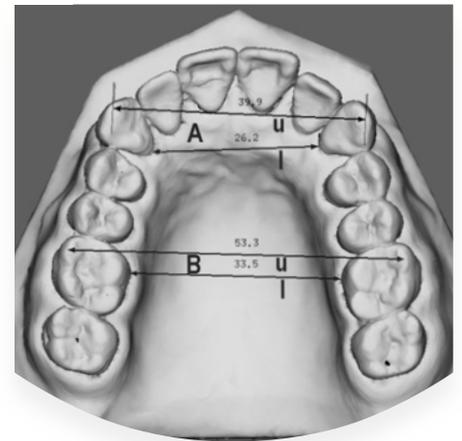
When you first meet with an orthodontist, you may not know whether you need treatment. If the orthodontist believes you may benefit from treatment, the diagnostic records may be taken at that time, or you may be given a separate appointment for taking the records. The mission of an orthodontist is to bring the teeth, lips and jaw into proper alignment, making the gathering of current patient records a key component of the process.

Once it is determined that you could benefit from treatment, the next step is for orthodontic records to be created. Just like a home builder begins with blueprints, an

orthodontist needs blueprints, or records, of your teeth, jaw, face and underlying structures. With those in hand, your doctor is then able to determine an effective treatment plan to help you achieve the results that you want and need.

So, just how are orthodontic records taken? It's actually much easier than you may be thinking. During your records appointment, a series of measurements will be taken, so that the orthodontist has the information needed to devise the right custom plan for you. Some of the records that you can expect to be taken include:

Impressions. There will be dental impressions, or molds, taken of your teeth at your records appointment. From this, plaster or digital replicas will be made. These dental impressions, as they are referred to, are made by having a gel-like material placed over the teeth and allowing it to set. These molds of your teeth play an important role in helping the orthodontist to evaluate the current positioning of your teeth, as well as predict their future placement following treatment. The molds are kept with your patient file and are also used as a permanent record.



Radiographs. At your records appointment, you can expect to have a series of radiographs (x-rays) taken. These x-rays include a panoramic view which will provide a look at both the top and bottom teeth together on one film. These are especially important for children and adolescents because they will show developing teeth that are not yet visible, giving the orthodontist the ability to predict where they will erupt. It is also important for adults because it will show the current jaw and bone health, and whether there are any missing or impacted teeth. Additional x-rays taken include the lateral cephalometric radiograph, or ceph, which plays an important role in helping the orthodontist to determine current jaw growth, bone structure and how it may change

throughout treatment. The cephalometric x-ray is one that will capture the side profile of a patient, from their chin to the top of their head, providing information about bone, teeth, soft tissue and jaw alignment. This radiograph is somewhat unique to orthodontic specialists and there is a good chance this will be your first lateral cephalometric radiograph, as general dentists do not routinely take these x-rays.

Photographs. Photos will be taken of the inside and outside of your mouth. The intraoral, which are inside the mouth, and the extraoral, which are outside of the mouth, will provide additional information to the orthodontist about your current profile. They will also become part of your permanent patient record and they are fun to review before and after results when your new smile is finished.



During your records appointment, you should feel comfortable enough to ask any questions that you may have. You will spend approximately 60 minutes with both a treatment coordinator and an orthodontic assistant during your records appointment. Whether you take a list of questions with you that you would like to have answered, or you think of them on the spot, the records appointment is a great time to get them all addressed.

Devising a Plan

All of the diagnostic records taken during your appointment are instrumental in helping the orthodontist devise the most effective treatment plan possible. They are the blueprints, or study aide, that will be used to determine everything from your current jaw and teeth position, to which course of treatment will provide the best route to achieving a healthy, beautiful and straight smile.

The more tools the orthodontist has for learning about your current situation, the more effective a treatment plan they can then devise. Think of the time that you put into your records appointment as a crucial stop along the way to an amazing smile. Like any wonderful journey, it helps to have a detailed map, so that you know where you are going and the best way to get there!

Getting Your Questions Answered

It's very common for parents and their children to have additional questions beyond the initial consultation. Between the anxiety of setting up the visit to sitting in an orthodontist's chair to the variety of preliminary and post-visit issues that have to be dealt with, it's easy to get overwhelmed. That's why modern orthodontists make it extremely simple for you to get the answers you need in a way that's simplest for you.

Here are just some of the ways you can get your questions answered in your way – and right on time:

Your orthodontist's website: Your orthodontist's website should feature a variety of patient resources including full explanations of every procedure, an interactive map with driving directions, links to the doctor's blog, an FAQ section and several ways to get in touch with the office if you don't find what you're looking for.

Your treatment coordinator: You will usually be assigned a patient contact person – we call this person a “treatment coordinator” in our office – with whom to schedule appointments, confer with rescheduling and, of course, answer any and all questions you may have. In some cases this may literally be the office receptionist or the dental care technician who assisted your orthodontist. More and more offices are assigning patient care representatives who are merely there for support, interaction and, of course, to answer you and your child's questions.

The follow-up visit: As you are likely aware, there are a variety of follow-up visits between 15- and 45-minutes in duration depending on the procedure your child is getting. These are wonderful opportunities to either a.) ask questions you may have missed the first time or b.) get further details from your orthodontist him- or herself.

Braces.org: The website of the American Association of Orthodontists offers a wide range of articles and patient information for your records prior to and during orthodontic treatment. The orthodontist locator is a popular feature to help you find a specialist close to home. Remember, only orthodontists can belong to the American Association of Orthodontists, so when you visit www.braces.org you know you're receiving accurate, state-of-the-art information regarding tooth and jaw alignment.



About the Author

Dr. Burtleson is an Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Orthodontics & Dentofacial Orthopedics at the University of Missouri - Kansas City School of Dentistry. He is the attending orthodontist at The Children's Mercy Hospital and serves on the Cleft Palate and Craniofacial Teams. He maintains a private practice and resides with his wife and three children in Kansas City, Missouri.