

# HOW WILL I KNOW IF MY CHILD NEEDS BRACES?

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It seems like more and more young kids are getting braces these days. It used to be that only teenagers had braces. So you may be wondering whether or not your child will need braces. Monitoring the developing bite is an essential part of any pediatric dental exam. Your pediatric dentist will make predictions to determine if the space in the mouth, or "dental arch" is big enough to accommodate the space needed for the permanent teeth. That's the key to determining the need for braces. **Is the space present bigger or less than the space needed?** Surprisingly, these predictions can first be made as young as 3-4 years of age. This is very useful for parents to plan for their child's orthodontic future down the road in either late childhood or early adolescence. Children with wide open spaces in their baby tooth smile actually have the best chances of having straighter teeth as teens and adults. Most



people assume that their child's face will grow and gain space for the adult teeth. While it is true that their jaw bones will grow, that growth happens behind the molars and moves the face downward and forward. That also means that kids won't gain any extra space in their dental arch from this growth. Your pediatric dentist can help you understand your child's individual space concerns.

Besides the comparison between space present vs. space needed, there are many other considerations that a pediatric dentist can help guide you through your child's growth and development. Habits like thumb sucking, prolonged pacifier use, tongue thrusting, and issues like obstructive sleep apnea can all have a negative effect on their developing bite. Your pediatric dentist can assist you in the best strategies and timelines to minimize or eliminate the risks of causing irreversible changes to your child's developing bite.

**It's a question of  
space present vs.  
space needed**

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