

# Overbites and overjets

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IN THE third part of our series of articles on orthodontics, we find out more about overbites and overjets

## What is an overbite and an overjet?

Sometimes the relationship between the top and bottom jaw does not match. The top jaw may be forward of the bottom jaw, and this is called an overjet. This can look as if the top teeth are 'bucky' or too far forward in the mouth, but it is normally because the lower jaw is too far back. A reverse bite is when the jaw is too far forward. The overbite is how much the top and bottom teeth overlap. This article will look at overjets.

## What causes an overjet?

The common causes of an increased overjet include crowded or overlapping teeth; thumb or finger sucking habit causing the top teeth to stick out; the lower jaw is too far back and makes the top teeth look prominent.

## How do you fix an overjet?

There are several different options to correct an overjet depending on the severity and the true nature of the problem. These include:

- Stop the thumb habit early enough and let the problem subside
- Braces to correct the crowding
- Functional appliances or growth plates to bring the jaw forwards. These can be removable in a younger child between 8-11 years of age or fixed in children up to 18 years of age
- In adults, jaw surgery may be needed to bring the jaw forwards.

## What is a removable functional appliance?

The functional appliance used consists of removable plates that work on the upper and lower jaw at the same time. It is called a 'Clark Twin Block' (CTB). The plates are worn for at least 12 months full time during growth. Night time wear may then be required for a few more months to keep the jaw stable. They are removed for cleaning and sometimes eating.

## What is the ideal time to start growth treatments?

The best time to start functional plates or a growth treatment is just before children start their pubertal growth spurt, so that the growth of the face and skeleton can be used to direct the growth of the jaws. This is usually about 10-12 years of age. Younger children can be started as early as eight years old, especially if the prominent teeth are at risk of being traumatised or broken, if there are social problems because teeth stick out, or speech is a problem.

## How will I know if my child needs this treatment?

The best thing to do is for children to have an early consultation so the best timing of treatment can be decided. At least then it is not going to be too late to do a growth treatment because your child has finished growing! You do not have to wait until all the permanent teeth have come through before you start orthodontics, in fact sometimes this is too late to correct some problems easily.

For more information or to book an appointment, phone the surgery on 5331 9489.