

# Brace Yourself!

## Exploring Orthodontics, from Invisalign to the Damon System

by Paige Turner

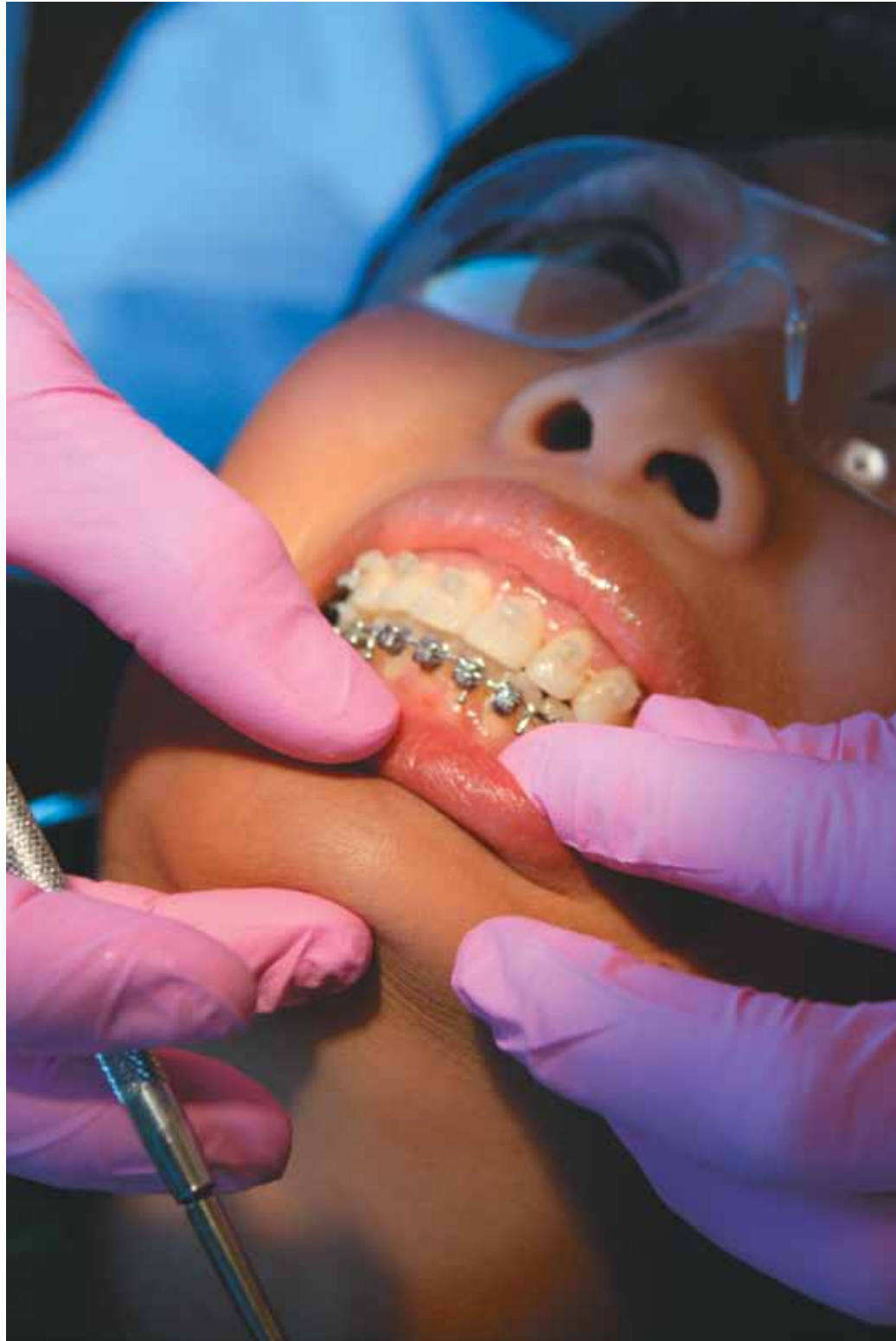
**I**F YOU HAVE SPENT ANY TIME researching orthodontists in the area, there is a good chance you have stumbled across one or two by the name of Damon. Expand your search outside of the immediate Spokane vicinity and that number will increase. The Damon family name and dentistry go hand-in-hand, as they contribute to the orthodontic excellence of our region.

“Unquestionably, the six orthodontists in my family represent a vast amount of knowledge and experience in the field of orthodontics,” says Dr. Clay Damon, of Damon & Damon Orthodontics on Spokane’s north side. “Our patients are benefiting from our collective experience. My father, Dr. Floyd Damon, and my uncle, Dr. Dwight Damon have both been an inspiration for me. They have set an example for continued growth and improvement. I became interested in my father’s work at an early age. I remember him saying to me, ‘If you are practicing the same way now as when you started, you are not growing and progressing.’ I am passionate about helping my patients to have the beautiful smiles that are possible for them through orthodontics.”

About 4.5 million Americans wear braces or other dental appliances to straighten their teeth, according to the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO). Many more - an estimated 50 to 75 percent of the population - have some form of malocclusion or misaligned teeth and could benefit from orthodontic treatment.

The majority of orthodontic patients are children or teenagers - commonly starting treatment between 9 and 14 years of age. Now, however, with innovative treatment alternatives to traditional braces, more adults are opting to go into treatment. One in five patients is an adult age 18 or older, according to the AAO, and many parents are going into treatment with their children, which can be a great way to save time by scheduling joint appointments.

“Sometimes you can’t see an orthodontic problem,” says Dr. Clay Damon. “People



tend to focus on the front teeth that show the most, and if those teeth appear okay they are not always aware that a problem exists with how the rest of the teeth are developing and working. The recommended age for an orthodontic evaluation is age seven because at that age most of the permanent front teeth and the six-year molars are developed enough to detect problems.”

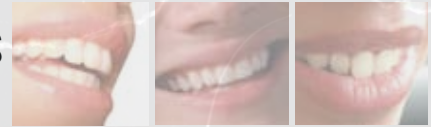
Teeth that are crooked, misaligned or have too much or too little space in between are among the most common problems treated with braces. Hereditary factors like a smaller palate can contribute to these problems. Environmental factors including thumb-sucking or accidents are other causes. In addition to impacting one’s appearance, teeth that are badly misaligned can impede eating and speech.

“Genetics are a major cause, but diet, accidents and habits, to name a few, also play a role in tooth and jaw development,” says Dr. Clay Damon. Careful nutrition and good oral hygiene are very important. Finger or thumb sucking and tongue thrusting may also have an adverse impact on tooth and jaw development. Additionally, airway problems that lead to mouth breathing and improper tongue posture can cause problems. Regular dental checkups are essential. Early loss of primary (baby) teeth must be carefully monitored, and in some cases a space maintainer is recommended to retain space for unerupted permanent teeth.

Children who do not have enough space for all of their permanent teeth may need to have primary teeth removed to control the space available for permanent teeth. Children who inherit large teeth from one parent and small jaw width from the other parent typically need early orthodontic intervention by an orthodontist, with a primary goal being to make sure there is enough space for permanent teeth. It is highly desirable to avoid removal of permanent premolars also known as bicuspids. Retaining these teeth helps the patient to enjoy a full smile and lip and cheek support as they age.

Another plus for early orthodontic evaluations is the use of diagnostic imaging to confirm the presence of all of the permanent teeth. If a child is missing permanent teeth the orthodontist takes that into account when making treatment recommendations.

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When it comes to selecting the best orthodontic treatment, the options can be overwhelming. Here are some tips for finding the right treatment for you or your child, addressing common problems and keeping cost-saving considerations in mind.

An orthodontist or dentist can tell you if you need braces or some other treatment to correct misaligned teeth. The initial consultation to determine if you need braces is almost always a budget friendly, free-of-charge visit, making it easy to get more than one opinion.

One of the most cosmetically appealing treatments for aligning your teeth can also be very affordable. Invisalign straightens teeth like metal braces and costs about the same, but is virtually invisible on your teeth. Invisalign clear braces are available for adults and teens, and can save more time with shorter and fewer office visits. Orthodontists consistently say that anyone with healthy teeth and gums can straighten their smile at any time, regard-

less of age. A series of clear aligners, made from smooth plastic, custom-made to fit to your teeth, eliminates the gum and mouth irritation often associated with metal braces while moving your teeth in small increments so there's little pain. This treatment can also prevent costly emergency visits for broken wires, as well as post-treatment teeth whitening or repair.

If not cared for properly, fixed wire and bracket braces can make it difficult to brush and floss, leaving teeth vulnerable to developing decay, plaque, periodontal disease and stains that must be taken care of after braces are removed. Because Invisalign wearers can remove their aligners to brush and floss, they can more easily maintain good oral hygiene.

On the flip side, some patients have noted that Invisalign are more expensive, they may add a lisp to your speech, and when you switch to a new aligner (typically every two weeks) they can be tight and painful. Additionally, because of how easily they come out, it can be tempting to

remove the aligner, which counteracts all of the work they are doing, and prolongs the treatment process.

One of the most popular options for braces was created by Spokane's own Dr. Dwight Damon and is called the Damon System. Used by orthodontists nationwide, the Damon System uses passive self-ligating, or "tie-less" braces, which don't need to be tightened like traditional braces and are gentle on the teeth and tissues. Additionally, the Damon System uses high technology wires that move teeth faster and require few adjustments.

Two additional benefits of the Damon System are that it typically requires a shorter treatment time than traditional braces, which means patients see the results sooner and in fewer appointments, and the treatment process usually can be done without extractions or rapid palatal expanders. This is a huge draw for anyone who has endured the pain of an extraction or palate expansion.

"Anyone who is a candidate for braces

will benefit from the Damon System," says Dr. Paul Damon, of Damon & Magnuson Orthodontics in Spokane Valley. "This technology actually opens up additional options for patients contemplating permanent tooth extractions, palatal expansion, headgear or jaw surgery."

The popularity of the Damon System knows no boundaries when it comes to the age of their patient. "We are treating more adults than ever before as they see the facial and esthetic benefits of a well-designed smile," says Dr. Paul Damon. "Children and adolescents are most often treated with only one phase of orthodontics. Two phases of treatment was once expected for crowded or complex malocclusions. Adults and children benefit from far fewer permanent tooth extractions than in the past."

Seeking orthodontic treatment can have a positive impact on your health, confidence and looks. It can be an expensive experience, but one that is worth the investment.

Many dental insurance plans cover orthodontic treatment, but when less than 100 percent is covered, or for those without dental insurance, many orthodontists now offer payment plans that allow you to spread the cost of treatment out over the course of treatment rather than paying in budget-busting lump sums at the beginning and end of treatment.

Setting aside pre-tax dollars in a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) through your employer is another way to make paying for braces easier.

"Orthodontics goes way beyond straight teeth," says Dr. Paul Damon. "Smile design needs to incorporate facial esthetics. We make decisions for youngsters that will have an effect on their facial balance, lips, profile and smile for a lifetime. How we correct an overbite, for instance, depends on a patient's facial features."

Making those corrections is something that has been a passion of the orthodontists in the Damon family for years, and which continues to benefit local orthodontic patients. ■

Visit [www.invisalign.com](http://www.invisalign.com), [www.damonbraces.com](http://www.damonbraces.com), [www.damonanddamon.com](http://www.damonanddamon.com) and [www.dmdortho.com](http://www.dmdortho.com) to learn more.

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