

## Head Start for Healthy Smiles

By Dr. Reginald Griggs  
SPECIAL TO THE FORUM

The American Association of Orthodontists recommends that a child's first visit to an orthodontist take place when an orthodontic problem is first detected.

Depending on the problem, whether it is a jaw growth problem, tooth problem or both, this first visit could take place as early as age 2 or 3, as the primary teeth erupt.

Whether an orthodontic problem is detected, however, a child should visit an orthodontist for a checkup no later than age 7. This may surprise you because orthodontic treatment is usually associated with adolescence.

Although treatment will not necessarily begin at this early age, an examination is important to ensure maximum dental health for your child.

The following early warning signs may indicate that your child should have an orthodontic evaluation:

- Early or late loss of teeth
- Difficulty in chewing or biting

- Mouth breathing
- Thumb sucking
- Crowding, misplaced or blocked-out teeth
- Jaws that shift or make sounds
- Speech difficulties
- Biting the cheek or the roof of the mouth
- Teeth that meet abnormally or don't meet at all
- Facial imbalance
- Jaws that are too far forward or back
- Grinding or clenching of the teeth

An orthodontic examination is advisable any time a particular problem is noted by the parent, family dentist, or child's physician.

Without treatment, many problems become worse and can require additional dental care later in life.

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