

The New York Times

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April 16, 2009

Immediate Attention, or Not?

By CATHERINE SAINT LOUIS

UNTIL the economy brightens, some parents are postponing their children's orthodontics. Several experts, including Dr. Raymond George Sr., the president of the American Association of Orthodontists, were asked which problems need immediate action.

WHERE TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE Overjet, when the top teeth flare outward, represents a "risk of trauma," said Dr. David Cordes, who teaches at the [University of Connecticut](#) School of Dental Medicine. If children fall or are hit with a ball and crack a tooth, then a root canal and a crown may be required.

MILD TO MODERATE UNDERBITE When the bottom jaw is out in front of the upper, it's a skeletal problem that's correctable with braces at 7 or 8 years old, said Dr. Benjamin Burris of Arkansas. But if you wait until your child is older, jaw surgery could be in store.

IMPACTED TEETH Losing baby teeth early can cause back teeth to drift into spots where adult teeth are meant to come in. Then they become impacted. Braces can create room for those teeth to grow out, Dr. George said.

CASES WHERE WAITING WON'T HURT Parents often ask Dr. Burris if their child needs orthodontics. "Orthodontics is not a need," he tells them. "Food, shelter, those are needs. Orthodontics, by and large, is a want." Dr. Cordes said mild cases don't demand quick action if they are cosmetic rather than trauma risk, or a functional issue where chewing is troublesome. Many orthodontists offer free consultations, he said, so why not check?

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