dr. martha rich
HEALTH CENTERED DENTISTRY

Functional Orthodontics for Kids and Teens

Even though orthodontic treatment can be performed at any age, the ideal time to evaluate if orthodontics might be necessary is between the ages of 7 and 9. Some of the permanent teeth have already erupted at this age, and x-rays begin to show how the rest of the adult teeth are developing, where they are currently positioned, and how big they might be. Crowding and other issues can be very apparent at this stage, and using functional appliances to expand and lengthen the arches can often allow the rest of the teeth to erupt normally – significantly reducing or even eliminating the amount of orthodontic treatment that may be needed to finish correcting final tooth alignment as a teenager.

Narrow arches often develop in children at this age due to airway or allergy issues that cause them to breathe through the mouth most of the time. The tongue is the muscle that creates a beautiful, wide palate as we grow by resting against the roof of the mouth. However, if breathing is inhibited at night or during the day, and the mouth is open much of the time, the tongue lies on the floor of the mouth, the cheeks fall in, and the arches do not widen appropriately to accommodate the incoming adult teeth.

Dr. Rich often works in conjunction with pediatric physicians to determine if enlarged tonsils and adenoids, or allergy issues, present any ongoing breathing problems that might cause the teeth to regress after orthodontic treatment. Early diagnosis and intervention of childhood breathing disorders can not only help develop a strong and healthy bite, but may also help to prevent or cure obstructive sleep apnea issues as an adult.

With the exception of the wisdom teeth, all the adult or permanent teeth are usually fully erupted between the ages of 10 and 14. For those children whose teeth did not align completely on their own, or through functional appliance therapy, this is the ideal time for final alignment with braces if it is necessary or desired.