

What Is a Crossbite?

A crossbite is a type of *malocclusion* (misalignment of teeth). Simply put, the teeth don't fit together the way they're supposed to.

When a person's bite is correct, the upper teeth come down slightly over the lower teeth. For someone with a crossbite, that isn't happening. The top and bottom teeth either don't come together or do not bite in the correct position (or both).

There are different types of crossbites. The way they look and the ways they affect a person vary by the type. One or more of the upper teeth may appear to be behind the lower arch when the mouth is closed. Another example is the lower teeth overlapping the upper ones. If the front teeth are the problem, it's called an *anterior crossbite* or an *underbite*. When the back teeth are the irregular ones, that's a *posterior crossbite*.

Why Crossbites Occur

For most people with crossbites, it's a hereditary trait. Therefore, if a parent or other close relative has a crossbite or had work done to correct one, that's a good reason to visit an orthodontist for an examination. This is especially the case if you have children. It's usually a lot easier to treat a crossbite during childhood (more on that later).

Crossbites aren't just genetic, though. There are other circumstances that can cause them. Sometimes permanent teeth come in before all the baby teeth have fallen out, and that can cause misalignment because they don't have enough room to grow in correctly.

Unusual jaw sizes or alignments can also create crossbites.

Health Problems Crossbites Cause

There are several health problems that result from crossbites that go untreated.

Discomfort is very common, but there are other problems that can be much more serious. Among them are receding gums, tooth loss, and jaw pain.

If the crossbite is also related to a narrow upper palate and jaw, there can be bite problems. There can even be breathing troubles. People with crossbites are also likely to experience chipping and grinding of the teeth, heightened sensitivity in the teeth, uneven wearing of the enamel, and headaches.

In children, crossbites can cause problems in the way the jaw grows, which in the worst cases can lead to an unbalanced facial appearance and even speech impediments.

Problems from crossbites don't just occur in the mouth. The misalignment of the teeth can also mean that facial muscles don't engage equally. Muscle strains and neck pain can result from that. Adults with crossbites untreated in childhood can experience severe pain in the joints and supporting muscles of the jaw as they get older. Normal activities such as opening one's mouth when eating can become very uncomfortable because of those motions becoming restricted.

Other Problems Due to Crossbites

In addition to the health problems crossbites can cause, there can be consequences related to a person's self-esteem. Minor crossbites may not be that noticeable to others, but more serious ones can very markedly affect a person's appearance. In some of the most severe cases, there can be facial asymmetry.

Adults may suffer due to a lack of confidence. At social gatherings, during job interviews, and in the workplace, for instance, a person whose appearance is affected by a crossbite may feel uncomfortable or self-conscious. As a result, that person might struggle to form relationships, and work performance could suffer as well.

For children, this can be even tougher. The same issues as above exist, but there is also the worry that other children will tease them. We all remember how mean things could sometimes get in school, and it's easy to imagine the sense of despair and unworthiness a child relentlessly teased for his or her appearance can feel.

How To Treat a Crossbite

In most cases, an orthodontist uses braces or a process called Invisalign to treat a crossbite. The brackets and wires applied to the teeth create pressure that over time aligns the teeth properly. Sometimes retainers or expanders work as well by widening the jaw.

For children with crossbites, it's important to begin treatment at an early age. This has two principal benefits. One is that starting early improves the chances of complete correction. The other is that while the jaw is still growing, an orthodontist can take measures to prevent further misalignment and to keep growth going in the right direction. Once the jaw is fully grown, that's no longer possible. Then other interventions that can be more complicated become necessary.

Even beginning treatment during the teenage years can make things more difficult since the remaining time for jaw growth may not be sufficient for the preferred approach. If at all possible, crossbite treatment should begin and reach completion before all of the permanent teeth have erupted (meaning they have entered the mouth and become visible).

Fixing crossbites is usually faster and easier when the patient is a child, but adults can have them corrected as well. When adults whose crossbites are mild or moderate seek treatment,

braces, retainers, or Invisalign may be enough. However, in very severe cases, oral surgery may be necessary. Surgery is sometimes part of a child's treatment as well if other measures do not work or exceptional circumstances apply.

Seeing an Orthodontist

Crossbite detection and correction is another reason to see a dental professional on a regular basis (every 6 months is the typical recommendation). While dentists do not treat crossbites themselves, they can recognize the signs of one and refer patients to trusted orthodontists. When young children see a dentist as recommended, there is a very good chance that crossbite detection will occur early enough for the best chance of a complete correction.

However, you don't have to wait for a dental examination. If, after reading this post, you think you or a family member may have a crossbite, you can make an appointment with an orthodontist. You'll receive a complete examination, clear explanations of what the orthodontist finds, and recommendations for how to proceed. In the likelihood of needing braces, it's also reassuring to know that today orthodontists have a wide variety of styles, colors, and materials for braces. You'll be able to choose something that best fits your needs and your lifestyle.

A great, healthy smile is an important asset in so many ways. To address crossbite issues, schedule a consultation today!

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SOURCES USED:

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<https://vacortho.com/crossbite/>

<https://www.pureorthodontics.ca/blog/what-are-the-effects-of-crossbites-and-how-can-it-be-fixed>