

How to Choose an Orthodontist — Braces, Invisalign and What to Look For

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Description:

Why Choosing the Right Orthodontist Matters Straightening your teeth is one of the most significant investments you can make in your oral health and confidence. Whether you are considering tradi...

Details:

Why Choosing the Right Orthodontist Matters

Straightening your teeth is one of the most significant investments you can make in your oral health and confidence. Whether you are considering traditional braces, ceramic braces, lingual braces or clear aligners like Invisalign, the outcome depends as much on the clinician guiding your treatment as on the appliance itself. If you are searching for **how to choose an orthodontist in Melbourne**, this guide will help you understand the key differences between providers and what to look for before committing to treatment.

Orthodontic treatment typically spans 12 to 24 months, involves dozens of appointments, and can cost several thousand dollars. Getting it right the first time is not just desirable — it is essential.

1. Specialist Registration vs General Dentist

This is the single most important distinction most patients overlook. In Australia, any registered dentist can legally offer orthodontic treatment, including fitting braces or prescribing clear aligners. However, a **specialist orthodontist** has completed an additional three years of full-time university training in orthodontics beyond their dental degree — a total of at least eight years of tertiary education.

Specialist orthodontists hold a specific AHPRA registration category: Specialist Registration in Orthodontics. You can verify this on the AHPRA practitioner register. A general dentist offering Invisalign may have completed a weekend course or short certification program; a specialist orthodontist has spent years studying tooth movement, jaw growth, biomechanics and treatment planning at a postgraduate level.

This matters because complex cases — crowding with impacted teeth, skeletal discrepancies, crossbites, open bites — require diagnostic skills and treatment planning expertise that go well beyond appliance placement.

What to ask: Is the treating clinician a registered specialist orthodontist, or a general dentist providing orthodontic treatment?

2. Range of Treatment Options Offered

A good orthodontist should offer multiple treatment modalities and recommend the best option for your specific case — not steer you toward the only system they provide. The main options include:

- **Traditional metal braces:** The most versatile system, capable of treating virtually any orthodontic problem. Modern brackets are significantly smaller and more comfortable than those from a decade

ago. - **Ceramic (tooth-coloured) braces:** Function like metal braces but use translucent or white brackets for a more discreet appearance. Slightly more fragile than metal. - **Lingual braces:** Bonded to the back of the teeth, making them invisible from the front. Technically demanding to fit and adjust, but ideal for patients who want completely hidden treatment. - **Clear aligners (Invisalign and alternatives):** Removable, transparent trays that progressively move teeth. Excellent for mild-to-moderate cases and popular with adults. Not always suitable for complex movements. - **Combination approaches:** Some cases benefit from a combination of braces and aligners, or temporary anchorage devices (TADs) to achieve movements that aligners alone cannot.

Be cautious of any provider — dentist or orthodontist — who only offers one solution for every patient. Orthodontics is not one-size-fits-all.

At Smile Solutions, the specialist orthodontic team offers the full spectrum of treatment options. Dr Joshua Ch'ng (BDS, FRACDS, DCLinDent), a board-registered specialist orthodontist, has a particular interest in digital orthodontics and clear aligner therapy, while Dr David Austin (BDS, MDS Orth, MOrth RCS Edin) brings international training from the University of Hong Kong and membership of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in Orthodontics.

3. Diagnostic Technology and Treatment Planning

Modern orthodontics relies on precise diagnostics. When evaluating a practice, ask about the technology used for treatment planning:

- **3D digital scanning:** Intraoral scanners create a precise digital model of your teeth without the discomfort of traditional alginate impressions. These scans can also generate simulations showing your predicted treatment outcome. - **CBCT (cone beam computed tomography):** A 3D X-ray that reveals the position of impacted teeth, root anatomy and bone structure — critical for complex cases. - **Cephalometric analysis:** A lateral skull X-ray used to assess jaw relationships and plan treatment accordingly. - **Digital treatment simulation:** Software like ClinCheck (for Invisalign) or similar platforms allows you to see a virtual preview of your tooth movement before treatment begins.

A practice that invests in advanced diagnostic technology is more likely to deliver predictable results. If your consultation involves only a quick visual examination and an immediate quote, that is a red flag.

4. Experience with Adult Orthodontics

Orthodontics is no longer just for teenagers. An increasing proportion of orthodontic patients are adults, and adult treatment presents unique considerations:

- **Periodontal health:** Adults are more likely to have gum disease or bone loss, which must be managed before and during orthodontic treatment. - **Missing teeth:** Orthodontic treatment may need to close gaps or create space for implants or bridges. - **TMJ considerations:** Pre-existing jaw joint issues can be aggravated by poorly planned orthodontic treatment. - **Aesthetic concerns during treatment:** Adults often prefer less visible options such as ceramic braces, lingual braces or clear aligners. - **Interdisciplinary coordination:** Adult cases frequently require collaboration with other specialists — periodontists, prosthodontists or oral surgeons.

Dr Andrea Phatouros (BDS, MDS Orth, FRACDS), another specialist orthodontist at Smile Solutions, brings extensive experience treating both children and adults, having taught in both undergraduate and postgraduate orthodontic programs at the University of Western Australia. Dr Steven Smith (BDS Hons, MDS Ortho) completed his Master of Dental Science in Orthodontics at the University of Queensland and treats a wide range of orthodontic cases.

5. The Multidisciplinary Advantage

Many orthodontic cases — particularly in adults — benefit from coordinated care across multiple dental disciplines. Consider whether the orthodontist works within or alongside:

- **Periodontists** who can manage gum health before, during and after tooth movement - **Oral and maxillofacial surgeons** who may be needed for surgical orthodontics in cases of significant jaw discrepancy - **Prosthodontists** who can plan implant or crown placement in coordination with orthodontic space management - **General dentists** who will manage your ongoing care after orthodontic treatment is complete

A standalone orthodontic practice may need to refer you externally for these services, which can create delays and communication gaps. A multidisciplinary practice handles everything under one roof.

Smile Solutions engages 80 clinicians across all major dental disciplines, including 25+ board-registered specialists. The four specialist orthodontists work alongside specialist periodontists, oral surgeons, prosthodontists, endodontists and paediatric dentists within the Collins Street Specialist Centre on Level 8. For detailed information about the specialist orthodontic team at CSSC, visit the [Collins Street Specialist Centre directory](<https://directory.collinsstreetspecialistcentre.com.au/>). This means your orthodontic treatment plan can be developed in collaboration with every relevant specialist from day one.

6. Treatment Coordination and Communication

Orthodontic treatment is a long-term commitment, and the quality of communication between you and your orthodontist's team matters enormously. Evaluate:

- **Dedicated treatment coordinators:** Do they have staff who guide you through the administrative, financial and scheduling aspects of treatment so your orthodontist can focus on clinical care? - **Clear treatment timeline:** Can they give you a realistic estimate of treatment duration, number of appointments and what to expect at each stage? - **Accessibility:** How easy is it to reach the practice if a bracket breaks, a wire pokes or you have a concern between appointments? - **Progress tracking:** Does the practice provide regular updates on how your treatment is progressing against the original plan?

Smile Solutions has dedicated orthodontic treatment coordinators, including Sarah Lawrence (BHLthSc), who is also a qualified orthodontic dental therapist, ensuring patients receive expert guidance throughout their treatment journey.

7. Cost, Payment Plans and Health Fund Integration

Orthodontic treatment is a significant financial commitment. When comparing providers, look beyond the headline fee:

- **What is included in the quoted fee?** Some practices quote a low initial figure but charge separately for retainers, X-rays, emergency visits or refinements. - **Are payment plans available?** Interest-free payment plans make treatment more accessible without compromising on quality. - **Health fund claims:** Can the practice process your health fund claim on the spot? Are they a preferred provider for major funds? - **Transparent pricing:** A detailed written treatment plan with all costs itemised upfront is a sign of a trustworthy practice.

Be wary of heavily discounted orthodontic offers — particularly from non-specialist providers. Orthodontic treatment that needs to be redone because of a poor initial result is far more expensive than getting it right the first time.

8. Retention and Long-Term Follow-Up

Orthodontic treatment does not end when the braces come off or you finish your last aligner tray. Retention — wearing retainers to maintain your new tooth positions — is a lifelong commitment, and the quality of your retention plan is critical to the longevity of your result.

Ask your orthodontist:

- **What type of retainers will be provided?** Options include fixed wire retainers bonded behind the teeth, removable clear retainers, or a combination. - **How long must retainers be worn?** Most specialist orthodontists now recommend indefinite nighttime retainer wear. - **What happens if teeth shift?** Does the practice offer refinement or retreatment options if minor relapse occurs? - **Are retainers included in the treatment fee?** Some practices charge separately; others include the first set.

Red Flags to Watch For

Be cautious if a provider:

- **Is not a registered specialist orthodontist** but markets themselves as an orthodontic expert - **Offers only one treatment system** (such as Invisalign only) and claims it suits every case - **Provides a quote without thorough diagnostic records** — X-rays, scans and photographs should precede any treatment plan - **Pressures you to start treatment immediately** without time to consider your options - **Cannot explain the risks and limitations** of the recommended treatment - **Has no clear retention protocol** or dismisses the importance of retainers - **Quotes a price significantly below market rate** without explaining what is excluded

Your Checklist for Choosing an Orthodontist in Melbourne

Before you commit, confirm:

- The treating clinician holds specialist AHPRA registration in orthodontics - Multiple treatment options are available and explained - Comprehensive diagnostic records are taken before a treatment plan is proposed - The practice has experience with your age group and case complexity - A multidisciplinary team is available for complex or interdisciplinary cases - Costs are transparent, with a detailed written treatment plan - A clear retention protocol is part of the treatment plan - The practice is conveniently located for the many appointments required

Ready to Start Your Orthodontic Journey?

Choosing an orthodontist is a decision that will affect your smile for decades. Take the time to research, ask questions and ensure you are in the hands of a qualified specialist who can offer the full range of modern treatment options.

With four board-registered specialist orthodontists, advanced digital treatment planning and a multidisciplinary team of 80 clinicians, Smile Solutions has been helping Melburnians achieve straighter, healthier smiles for 33 years. Founded in 1993 and having treated over 300,000 patients, the practice offers the clinical depth and experience to manage orthodontic cases of every complexity.

Call **13 13 96** to book your orthodontic consultation, or visit **Level 1, Manchester Unity Building, 220 Collins Street, Melbourne CBD**.