

Questions to Consider When Researching Direct-To-Consumer Orthodontic Companies

Some online orthodontic companies make their treatment sound so easy. Perhaps you take a selfie and/or an impression of your teeth or get your teeth scanned. Next, you receive aligners in the mail and after so many months - straight teeth! Right? What else is there to think about?

Before you decide to proceed with a direct-to-consumer orthodontic company, the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) believes there are a number of factors and questions you may want to consider. For example, in some instances direct-to-consumer orthodontic companies do not involve the in-person evaluation and/or in-person supervision of your orthodontic treatment by an orthodontist. An in-person evaluation and in-person supervision throughout treatment can be very important, because there is more to creating a healthy, beautiful smile than moving the visible portions of your teeth.

Orthodontic treatment involves the movement of biological material, which if not done correctly could lead to potentially irreversible and expensive damage such as tooth and gum loss, changed bites, and other issues.

Consider this question: What other transforming medical treatment would you undergo without an in-person, pre-treatment evaluation or ongoing in-person supervision from a medical professional?

Ask Questions, Get Answers

If you are researching orthodontic treatment (including treatment models from direct-to-consumer companies), here are a few questions you may want to consider:

1 As part of your treatment, are comprehensive diagnostic records like x-rays taken before your treatment?

YES

- Does the treatment and fee include x-rays of your teeth and jaws?
- Does the treatment and fee include a clinical examination of your jaw alignment, teeth, bite, and the relationship of your teeth to the skeletal structures?
- Does the treatment and fee include taking photographs of your face, facial profile, mouth, and teeth?
- Does the treatment and fee include taking digital scans or other impressions of your teeth?

NO — Are you comfortable starting orthodontic treatment without comprehensive diagnostic records? If you still want comprehensive diagnostic records taken, are you all right going to another dental professional to take them? If yes, what will that cost?

2 As part of your treatment fee, do you receive any in-person visits to a dentist's or orthodontist's office during your treatment?

YES

- How many?
- What occurs during these in-person visits?
- Is there a licensed dentist or orthodontist in the office to supervise the visits?

NO — are you comfortable with orthodontic treatment that does not involve any in-person visits with a dentist or orthodontist?

3 Is only one treatment type offered (such as invisible aligners or a certain appliance)?

YES — how do you know that is the best treatment option for you, given your unique situation and oral condition, compared to other treatment models (such as braces)?

NO — how is the decision being made for the best treatment model for you, and who is making that decision?

4 If a dentist or orthodontist is involved with your treatment, do you know the name of the dentist or orthodontist who will be specifically involved with your case (for example, is it available on the company's website or elsewhere)?

YES

- What are his or her education and credentials?
- In what state is he or she licensed?
- In what state does he or she practice?
- What do other patients being treated by him or her have to say?

NO — are you comfortable not being able to research your dentist's or orthodontist's background, credentials, patient reviews, etc. before you begin treatment?

5 How do you know if your teeth and gums are healthy enough for orthodontic treatment?

- Who is making that decision and how is it being determined?
- If the decision maker is a dentist or orthodontist not associated with your treatment, who pays for that assessment?

6 What are the possible risks (financial, health, etc.) associated with your orthodontic treatment?

7 Who can you speak with at the online orthodontic company about your orthodontic treatment?

- What is his or her education, background, qualifications and/or experience with orthodontics?

8 Who is responsible for detecting any issues that may occur during your orthodontic treatment?

- Is it you?
- If it is a doctor not associated with your treatment, who pays for those check-ups?

9 If an issue arises during your treatment, how will it be handled and who will be responsible for handling it?

10 If a doctor is involved with your orthodontic treatment, how can you contact him or her over the course of your treatment?

- How can you contact him or her if an emergency arises?

11 If an emergency arises, does the company have a dentist or orthodontist in your area that you can see in-person?

- If not, who would cover the costs associated with seeing a dentist or orthodontist in your area?

12 If you are injured or have another dispute involving your orthodontic treatment, how is it handled (litigation, arbitration, etc.)?

13 If you are injured or have a dispute involving your orthodontic treatment, what rights do you have against the person or company involved with your orthodontic treatment?

- Are you asked to sign any forms that seek to release them from liability?

Your Health Care Decisions Are Very Important Personal Decisions.

The AAO is a professional association of orthodontists dedicated to, among other things, "improving the health of the public by promoting quality orthodontic care, the importance of overall oral healthcare, and advocating for the public interest." Your health and well-being are extremely important.

Remember that orthodontic treatment is not a product or device – **orthodontic treatment is a professional, medical service.** When your care is personally supervised by an orthodontist who is a member of the American Association of Orthodontists, you are assured that your orthodontist spent years in a post-doctoral residency program focused on providing orthodontic treatment to patients.

Before making any decision about orthodontic treatment, consider doing some research and having an in-person consultation with a member of the American Association of Orthodontists. To find an AAO orthodontist near you, visit <https://www.aaoinfo.org/>.