



Getting It Straight

by Dr. Kirk Christensen,
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Q: *Is it really necessary to have an ideal bite, and if so, why?*

A: Sometimes patients or parents say to me, “we are not looking for perfection” when they are in a hurry to be finished with treatment. My standard reply to this is, ‘Ok, fine, but how imperfect do you want your case to be?’ Ideal has only one level; anything less has varying degrees. Very simply, if it is at all possible to finish an orthodontic case with an ideal bite and alignment, then it should be achieved. This is my goal for every patient, however, certain factors prevent attaining this in some patients, such as tongue posture and incorrect swallow, lip biting, lack of cooperation with elastics and headgear, or poor oral hygiene. Absence of supporting bone prevents tooth movement. Adult patients often have more limitations due to missing teeth or restorations.

!The main reasoning behind establishing an ideal occlusion (bite) and tooth alignment is so the oral system will function with the most efficiency. Everything about our bodies has a specific design for function. The chewing process is the first stage in the process of digestion. Being able to efficiently chew food allows it to be sheared and mashed into a substance that will be easily acted upon by the digestive juices of the stomach and eventually the small intestine. Hence, efficient chewing helps to ensure that all of the nutrients will be extracted from our food groups before being passed along as waste. Proper jaw and dental alignment helps us to speak clearly, too. !Secondly, ideal tooth alignment helps to keep the teeth naturally cleaner by eliminating crowded or tipped tooth areas where food and plaque can get trapped. !Thirdly, proper tooth alignment and occlusion prevents unwanted changes in tooth alignment because the teeth fit together and support each other. !Last, but not least, it is obvious that a perfect smile is more esthetic than one that has crowding, spaced apart teeth, protrusion, etcetera. True, you would have to have a very debilitated oral system to starve to death from it, but the process of eating, the ease of speaking and maintaining oral hygiene, and looking your best when you smile are excellent reasons for having an ideal bite.

Dr. Christensen's column appears weekly in the Northwest Herald. Questions to be answered and treatment inquiries may be directed to: **Woodstock Orthodontics, c/o Kirk H. Christensen, DDS, 226 West Judd Street, Woodstock, IL 60098, Phone: 815-337-5522**