



Getting It Straight

by Dr. Kirk Christensen,
Woodstock's Orthodontic Specialist

Q: What is the latest rage in orthodontics?

A: Presently, the major orthodontic bracket manufacturers are hyping the wonders of the self-ligating bracket. This is not a new technology, but has been recently improved upon, and is being marketed heavily. Historically, we have had to secure the archwire into the bracket slot with the use of ligatures (ties) which are either round elastic donut shaped rings, or stainless steel that needs to be twisted. Self ligating brackets do not require these ligatures as they have snap down doors or jaw like clips that hold the wire into the bracket. The benefits are reported to be: 1) time saving at each appointment, as they are faster to open and close than removal and replacement of ligature ties, 2) are more hygienic, as the elastic donut ties tend to attract plaque more than stainless steel, and 3) supposedly decrease treatment time due to reduced friction, and no decay of force ("alastic" ties loose elasticity over the course of a couple weeks). These benefits are all well and good, but are they worth the increased cost? These brackets may be as much as twice the cost as conventional brackets. This cost is passed onto the patients. My experience has shown that it is not the initial rotational alignment of the teeth that is time consuming, it is the correction of the poor occlusion that takes the most time, and is dependent on patient cooperation with rubber bands or headgear. The average treatment duration at Woodstock Orthodontics is a speedy and efficient 16-18 months with conventional brackets. If I were able to save a month or 2 in initial alignment with self ligating brackets, it is not significant enough to warrant such a cost increase for our patients. As far as hygiene is concerned, I find that good brushers have no problem with plaque, and poor brushers do. The same would be true with self ligation. When the cost comes down on this product, I would certainly consider it for our future patients.

!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**