



Getting It Straight

by Dr. Kirk Christensen,
Woodstock's Orthodontic Specialist

Q: *A friend of mine has braces and has a little screw in her gums that she hooks rubber bands to. What is that screw thing for?*

A: It is called a Microimplant, or Miniscrew. These devices have gained popularity in the orthodontic community over the past couple of years. It is really fascinating that little screws can be twisted through gum tissue into bone and support the forces necessary to move teeth and not move themselves. It was the advent of larger implants that are used to support crowns and bridges in areas of extracted or missing teeth that got us orthodontists interested in the potential for them as anchor units. One of the hurdles we have in orthodontics is trying to move some teeth one direction without moving others in an undesired direction at the same time. We have used extra-oral appliances like headgear, and also use large groupings of teeth as anchors when moving smaller groupings or individual teeth. Each of these methods have their own pluses and minuses. A solid anchor in the bone would allow us to move single or multiple teeth without affecting other teeth or relying on patient compliance with extra-oral anchorage. Regular tooth replacement implants are too large and costly to use, and are permanently in the bone, so they are impractical for orthodontics. The need for something much smaller, temporary, and cost effective spurred the development of the miniscrew. Many studies are being performed about their potential and their limitations, and our journals are packed with new articles every month. Some orthodontists are placing the screws in their own offices, while others are electing to have oral surgeons or periodontists place them. Minimal local anesthesia (tissue numbing injection into the gum tissue) is required for patient comfort. Damage to tooth roots is possible if the screw is placed in the wrong location, so appropriate training and sound planning is necessary. These devices are opening new doors in orthodontic world, and I will keep you posted right here with the latest developments.

!Dr. Christensen's column appears weekly in the Northwest Herald. Questions to be answered and treatment inquiries may be directed to:

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