



Getting It Straight

by Dr. Kirk Christensen,
Woodstock's Orthodontic Specialist

Q: *Why is jaw surgery needed to change someone's bite?*

A: Jaw surgery (also called orthognathic, meaning straight jaw, surgery) is usually required when a person's bite (occlusion) is not correctable by orthodontics alone. There are a few situations where this becomes necessary. Typically if a person's occlusion is very far from the range of normal, there is likely some skeletal component to it. This can be in the form of an anterior open bite (front teeth not coming together when a person bites together), a posterior open bite, a Class III malocclusion (lower front teeth in front of uppers), a Class II malocclusion (lower front teeth too far behind the uppers), and jaw asymmetries, where one or both jaws have grown more on one side of the face than the other. When these bites are seen in minor forms, they are usually correctable with braces and rubber bands, and/or extraction of permanent teeth. When these bite discrepancies are severe and include definite jaw involvement, surgery is often the most reliable way of getting the teeth to fit correctly in a stable manner. Typically, a person's facial appearance is dramatically improved, as well. Elective orthognathic surgery is only performed when we have established that a patient is done with growth. This reduces the possibility of relapse due to post surgical growth, and also eliminates the possibility of stunting of desired bone growth before its completion. As orthodontists, we try to use the growth periods to change jaw relations with orthopedic appliances. If this is unsuccessful, and a person is done growing, then we are often left with surgery as the best option. Orthodontic braces are necessary for surgical treatment, as we need to first get the dental arches aligned separately, so the surgeons can fit the upper and lower teeth together when the jaws are free to be repositioned. After initial bone healing is complete, the orthodontist will finish the details of the bite with braces and elastics.

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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