

Aligners, can my child use them too?



10.23804/ejpd.2023.24.04.01

Luigi Paglia
Editor in chief
European Journal of Paediatric Dentistry

Giuseppe Marzo
Director of the Postgraduate School in Orthodontics University of L'Aquila

editorial

This is a frequently asked question. The answer depends on various factors, with cooperation being among the most essential. As a parent, you must ask yourself if you can rely on your child to wear aligners correctly for most of the day. If the answer to this question is yes, then clear aligners may be a better choice than traditional braces. There are three major benefits of clear aligners in children:

1. Greater comfort, aligners are less voluminous than traditional braces and more likely to prevent irritation, mouth ulcers and other discomfort that derives from the movement of the orthodontic wire or braces.
2. Better hygiene, as their removal during meals and tooth cleaning manoeuvres makes home oral hygiene easier.
3. Better aesthetics, thanks to the transparency of the plastic replacing the metal.

However, a certain degree of caution is advised to those who are considering this treatment option. Although aligners allow us to start resolving certain tooth malpositions (which can cause periodontal and aesthetic problems or increase the severity of damage in the event of trauma), and to improve alignment and minor crowding at an early age, it must not be forgotten that the intervening period for changing the definitive position of individual teeth is still the period of permanent teeth. It is important to consider whether a child has a dental or skeletal problem. In cases where a child's problem is exclusively dental, the aligner may be one of the tools used. In cases of skeletal problems, the literature advises against the aligner, as it is not the right instrument at this stage of development. The literature in some cases refers to aligners as the universal remedy, valid for every malocclusion, presenting them as a panacea for all orthodontic problems of very young patients. It is necessary to remain open to the innovations that the market offers us and that can improve our daily clinic, and aligners can be a valid support in this regard, but, as dentists, we should always keep a critical and open eye on treatments with an evidence-based rationale. As with all other orthodontic appliances, aligners must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, keeping in mind that they are one of the tools in the hands of the clinician. When the clinical situation makes it possible and when both the child's requirements and the parent's expectations are fulfilled, it is certainly worth considering clear aligners as a viable route in the family-child's orthodontic treatment, making it as simple and convenient as possible. Lastly, we should remember the concept of efficiency regarding an orthodontic treatment, which depends on its cost/benefit ratio, with the former being understood in a biological sense and in terms of its impact on the life of the patient and their family with respect to duration, cooperation required, discomfort induced by the equipment used and frequency of check-ups. The latter should obviously be considered in terms of results obtained in relation to the pre-established treatment goals. A consideration that we should always keep in mind: let us never forget that is the orthodontist who treats the patient, not the appliance!