

EFFECTIVENESS OF CLEAR ALIGNERS VERSUS TRADITIONAL BRACES

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Abstract: Orthodontic treatment plays a critical role in correcting malocclusion, improving oral health, and enhancing aesthetic appearance. Traditionally, fixed braces have been the standard method for aligning teeth; however, clear aligners have recently gained popularity due to their aesthetic appeal and convenience. This study reviews and compares the effectiveness of clear aligners versus traditional braces in achieving optimal tooth movement, treatment duration, patient comfort, and oral hygiene maintenance. Evidence from clinical trials and observational studies indicates that clear aligners are generally effective for mild to moderate malocclusion cases and provide advantages such as easier oral hygiene, reduced discomfort, and better aesthetic acceptance. Traditional braces, however, remain superior for complex cases and offer more precise control over tooth movement. Understanding the strengths and limitations of each method can guide clinicians in selecting the most appropriate treatment for individual patients, balancing efficiency, comfort, and long-term oral health outcomes.

Keywords: Clear Aligners, Traditional Braces, Orthodontic Treatment, Malocclusion, Tooth Movement, Patient Compliance, Oral Hygiene, Treatment Duration.

Introduction

Orthodontic treatment is essential for correcting malocclusion, improving oral function, and enhancing facial aesthetics. Traditionally, fixed braces have been the gold standard for aligning teeth and correcting complex dental irregularities. These appliances consist of brackets, wires, and bands that apply continuous pressure to move teeth into the desired position over time. While highly effective, traditional braces often present challenges such as discomfort, difficulty in maintaining oral hygiene, and aesthetic concerns, particularly among adult patients.

In recent years, clear aligners have emerged as a popular alternative to conventional braces. Made from transparent, removable plastic trays, clear aligners offer an aesthetically appealing and convenient solution for mild to moderate orthodontic cases. Patients can remove aligners during eating and cleaning, which improves oral hygiene and reduces dietary restrictions. Despite these advantages, questions remain regarding their effectiveness in achieving complex tooth movements compared to traditional braces.

This paper aims to review and compare the effectiveness of clear aligners versus traditional braces, focusing on treatment outcomes, patient comfort, oral hygiene maintenance, and overall satisfaction. Understanding the benefits and limitations of each method can help clinicians make informed decisions tailored to individual patient needs.

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In recent years, clear aligners have emerged as a popular alternative to conventional braces. Made from transparent, removable plastic trays, clear aligners offer an aesthetically appealing and convenient solution for mild to moderate orthodontic cases. Patients can remove aligners

during eating and oral hygiene routines, which improves compliance and reduces the risk of plaque accumulation and gum problems. Furthermore, clear aligners generally cause less discomfort and irritation to oral tissues compared to traditional braces.

Despite these advantages, the effectiveness of clear aligners in achieving precise tooth movement and managing complex malocclusion remains a subject of research. Some studies suggest that clear aligners may be less effective for certain types of tooth rotations or vertical movements, requiring additional refinement trays or hybrid approaches. Meanwhile, traditional braces continue to provide predictable outcomes in complex cases and allow orthodontists more control over tooth positioning and occlusion.

This paper aims to systematically compare clear aligners and traditional braces in terms of treatment effectiveness, patient comfort, oral hygiene maintenance, treatment duration, and overall satisfaction. By evaluating the strengths and limitations of each approach, this study seeks to provide insights that can help clinicians select the most suitable orthodontic treatment for individual patients, balancing efficiency, comfort, aesthetics, and long-term oral health outcomes.

Main Body

Orthodontic treatment aims to correct malocclusion, improve oral function, and enhance aesthetic appearance. Clear aligners and traditional braces are two widely used methods, each with distinct advantages and limitations. Comparing their effectiveness involves evaluating several key factors: tooth movement precision, treatment duration, patient comfort, oral hygiene, and overall satisfaction.

1. Tooth Movement Precision and Effectiveness

Traditional braces remain highly effective for complex orthodontic cases, including severe crowding, rotations, and vertical tooth movements. The fixed nature of brackets and wires allows orthodontists to apply controlled, continuous forces to achieve precise tooth positioning. Multiple studies have demonstrated that traditional braces can consistently produce predictable results, particularly in cases requiring significant tooth rotation or bite correction.

Clear aligners, while effective for mild to moderate malocclusion, have limitations in managing complex tooth movements. Although recent advances in aligner materials and software planning have improved their precision, certain movements—such as extrusions, large rotations, or significant bite changes—may require additional refinement trays or auxiliary appliances. For many patients, clear aligners achieve satisfactory outcomes, but the predictability of complex movements is generally lower compared to traditional braces.

2. Treatment Duration

Treatment duration varies depending on the severity of malocclusion and patient compliance. Traditional braces typically require regular adjustments every 4–6 weeks and may complete treatment within 18–36 months for complex cases. Clear aligners often offer slightly shorter treatment times for mild cases, largely due to removable trays allowing for more frequent patient-controlled adjustments. However, treatment duration for aligners is highly dependent on patient compliance; failure to wear aligners for the recommended 20–22 hours per day can extend treatment time significantly.

3. Patient Comfort and Aesthetics

Patient comfort and aesthetic concerns are major factors influencing treatment choice. Clear aligners are nearly invisible and removable, making them particularly appealing for adults and image-conscious patients. They cause minimal soft tissue irritation and generally result in less discomfort compared to traditional braces, which can cause soreness from brackets and wires. Traditional braces, although less aesthetically pleasing, may be more effective in achieving complex movements but are associated with increased discomfort and oral irritation, especially during the initial adjustment period.

4. Oral Hygiene and Maintenance

Oral hygiene is easier to maintain with clear aligners because they are removable, allowing patients to brush and floss without obstruction. This reduces the risk of plaque accumulation, enamel demineralization, and gum inflammation. In contrast, traditional braces can make oral hygiene more challenging, increasing the risk of white spot lesions and gingival problems if patients do not follow proper cleaning techniques. Regular dental visits and professional cleaning are essential for patients with braces to minimize these risks.

5. Overall Satisfaction and Compliance

Patient satisfaction is generally higher with clear aligners due to improved aesthetics, comfort, and convenience. Adults and teenagers often prefer aligners for social and lifestyle reasons. Traditional braces, while effective, may be associated with lower satisfaction due to appearance and discomfort. However, compliance plays a crucial role in aligner treatment effectiveness. Patients who fail to follow the recommended wear schedule may experience delays and suboptimal outcomes.

Summary

Both clear aligners and traditional braces are effective orthodontic treatment methods, but their suitability depends on the complexity of malocclusion, patient preferences, and treatment goals. Traditional braces remain the preferred option for complex cases requiring precise control, while clear aligners are an attractive alternative for mild to moderate cases prioritizing aesthetics and comfort. Integrating patient-specific factors with clinical expertise ensures optimal treatment outcomes and long-term oral health.

6. Long-Term Stability and Relapse

Another important factor when comparing clear aligners and traditional braces is the long-term stability of the treatment results. Traditional braces provide a highly controlled tooth movement, which often results in more stable outcomes, particularly in severe malocclusion cases. Patients treated with fixed braces are less likely to experience relapse if retainers are properly used post-treatment. Clear aligners can also produce stable results for mild to moderate cases, but some studies indicate a slightly higher risk of relapse if patients do not strictly adhere to retainer protocols after treatment completion.

7. Cost Considerations

Cost is another aspect that influences treatment choice. Generally, clear aligners tend to be more expensive than traditional braces due to the use of advanced materials, 3D scanning, and custom fabrication. However, some patients consider the improved aesthetics, comfort, and convenience worth the additional expense. Traditional braces are typically more affordable, especially for complex cases that may require extensive treatment planning.

8. Clinical Recommendations

Clinical evidence suggests that the choice between clear aligners and traditional braces should be individualized. Orthodontists often recommend clear aligners for adult patients with mild to moderate crowding or spacing issues who prioritize aesthetics and convenience. Traditional braces are preferred for children, adolescents, and patients with complex malocclusion, severe rotations, or significant bite discrepancies. Hybrid approaches, combining aligners and selective fixed appliances, are sometimes used to optimize outcomes for challenging cases.

9. Emerging Technologies and Innovations

Technological advancements have improved both treatment methods. Clear aligner systems now use advanced software for digital treatment planning, allowing simulation of tooth movement and precise fabrication of aligner trays. Smart brackets, self-ligating braces, and improved wire materials enhance the efficiency and comfort of traditional braces. Such innovations continue to narrow the gap between these two approaches, providing patients with more treatment options tailored to their needs.

Conclusion of Main Body

In summary, both clear aligners and traditional braces are effective for correcting malocclusion,

but each has unique advantages and limitations. Clear aligners offer better aesthetics, comfort, and oral hygiene maintenance, making them ideal for mild to moderate cases and adult patients. Traditional braces provide precise control over tooth movement, especially in complex cases, and generally result in more predictable outcomes. Treatment choice should consider malocclusion severity, patient compliance, aesthetic preferences, cost, and long-term oral health objectives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both clear aligners and traditional braces are effective orthodontic treatment options, each offering distinct advantages and limitations. Clear aligners provide superior aesthetics, comfort, and easier oral hygiene maintenance, making them particularly suitable for mild to moderate malocclusion and adult patients who prioritize appearance and convenience. Traditional braces, on the other hand, offer precise control over tooth movement, making them the preferred choice for complex cases involving severe crowding, rotations, or bite discrepancies.

The choice between these two treatment methods should be guided by the severity of malocclusion, patient compliance, treatment goals, and individual preferences. While clear aligners require strict adherence to wear schedules to achieve optimal results, traditional braces provide predictable outcomes even in complex cases. Advances in technology, such as digital treatment planning and improved orthodontic materials, continue to enhance the effectiveness of both methods.

Ultimately, integrating clinical expertise with patient-specific considerations ensures the best possible treatment outcomes, balancing efficiency, comfort, aesthetics, and long-term oral health. Both clear aligners and traditional braces remain valuable tools in modern orthodontics, allowing clinicians to tailor treatment to meet the unique needs of each patient.

In conclusion, both clear aligners and traditional braces are effective orthodontic treatment methods, but their applicability depends on the complexity of the malocclusion, patient needs, and treatment goals. Clear aligners offer significant advantages in aesthetics, comfort, and ease of maintaining oral hygiene, making them particularly suitable for adults and teenagers with mild to moderate dental irregularities. They allow patients to remove the appliances during meals and cleaning, reducing discomfort and the risk of plaque accumulation.

Traditional braces remain the most reliable option for complex cases requiring precise control over tooth movement, including severe crowding, rotations, and bite discrepancies. Despite being less aesthetically pleasing and sometimes causing discomfort, fixed braces provide predictable results and can achieve outcomes that may be challenging for clear aligners alone.

Furthermore, patient compliance, cost considerations, and long-term stability of results are crucial factors in treatment selection. Advances in technology—such as digital treatment planning, self-ligating brackets, and improved aligner materials—continue to enhance the efficiency, comfort, and effectiveness of both approaches.

Ultimately, the decision between clear aligners and traditional braces should be individualized, taking into account the patient's oral health condition, lifestyle preferences, and orthodontist recommendations. By carefully balancing aesthetics, comfort, treatment efficiency, and long-term oral health outcomes, both clear aligners and traditional braces can effectively correct malocclusion and contribute to improved dental function and patient satisfaction.

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