

Invisalign

Everything You Need to Know About Invisalign

By [Kali Swenson](#) • Medical review by [Steven Davidowitz, DDS](#) on June 7th, 2019 ©



What is Invisalign?

Invisalign is an alternative to traditional metal braces that uses a series of removable clear aligners to straighten teeth and correct gaps, crowding, and bite issues. Made of a flexible plastic that fits snugly over your teeth to gradually adjust their position, the aligners (aka trays) are worn 24/7, except for when eating, drinking, or brushing teeth.

Treatment time typically ranges from 6–18 months, depending on the severity of the problem, though there are a number of ways to significantly speed tooth movement.

While Invisalign is an option for children, teens, and adults, the treatment is most popular with adults who had braces when they were younger and didn't wear a retainer to keep their teeth from moving. As with metal braces, you'll need to wear a retainer post-treatment to maintain your new smile.

Pros

- Invisalign is less noticeable than wire and bracket braces, and it usually takes less time.
- Seeing digital predictions of your tooth movement and end results is a strong motivator to stick with your customized plan.
- You'll be able to eat whatever you want and brush and floss normally, which will keep your mouth and teeth cleaner than with traditional braces. In fact, you're unlikely to have white decalcification spots or an uptick in cavities, according to dentists on RealSelf.
- RealSelf members who said it was Worth It went from hiding their teeth to smiling confidently.

Cons

- Invisalign is no quick fix—treatment time averages about 12 months.
- It takes real commitment to wear the trays for most of the day and night.
- Unless you're drinking clear, cold liquids, you'll have to remove the aligners before eating or drinking anything and replace them immediately afterward.
- The treatment can be uncomfortable, especially during the first few days of wearing a new aligner. Each tray is shaped to fit the alignment your teeth need to have after you've finished wearing it, so it will be snug and hard to get in and out when you start wearing it. Over time, the aligner will relax.
- Most people will need to wear some "attachments"—tiny, teeth-colored dots (or bumps) that are bonded to your teeth and then click into your aligners to help them make more complex movements—for the full course of their treatment. "Buttons," or small brackets that serve as anchors for rubber bands, may also be required. Attachments and buttons are not usually as noticeable as traditional braces, but they're still visible.
- When you start wearing your aligners, you may develop a slight speech impediment or experience excess saliva or dry mouth. These issues usually resolve within a few weeks.
- Once you've completed treatment, it's essential to wear a retainer at night to maintain your results. "Teeth naturally move, and if you don't push back against the forces that move them with a retainer, they'll eventually move back," says Dr. Steven Davidowitz, a New York City cosmetic dentist.
- RealSelf members who rated it Not Worth It reported that the aligners didn't correct their teeth enough, given the level of discomfort and hassle over a lengthy treatment time.

What happens during Invisalign treatment

Your dentist or orthodontist digitally scans your teeth, creates a customized treatment plan, and shows you an animated visualization of your new smile. Your custom aligners are 3-D printed and mailed to your dentist's office within a few weeks.

You'll pick up a series of new trays from your doctor every month or so. Each one will be slightly different, making small adjustments to your teeth's position.

Your treatment will likely include attachments that serve as "handles" for the aligners to engage teeth for specific movements. Ninety percent of people have some attachments for the duration of their treatment, and 40% need them on the front four teeth. The attachments are tooth-colored, small, and hard to see—but they're more noticeable when you wear the aligners, because the plastic accentuates them.

If you want your treatment to be as undetectable as possible, talk to your dentist about not placing attachments at all or, at least, not on the front four teeth. Be aware, however, that studies show attachments help move teeth more precisely and efficiently, which can speed up your treatment. “Without them, slight movements may not be possible, or it may prolong your treatment,” explains NYC dentist Dr. Victoria Veytsman. “It’s up to you if you wish to have them placed or not, but if you want optimal results, they’re highly recommended.”

You’ll wear each aligner for one to two weeks before moving on to the next set. The aligners have to be worn for 22 hours a day—essentially all day and night, except to clean them, eat, and brush and floss your teeth.

The aligners may not be comfortable at first, but be patient, says Dr. Veytsman. “The first few days of having something foreign in your mouth are always an adjustment.” The trays take a few days to really settle in and fit well. Biting on gauze or cotton throughout the day may help seat them properly. You can also buy Aligner Chewies, small cylinders made of a soft spongy material, or Movemints Clear Aligner Mints, sugar-free edible alternatives, for this same purpose.

You may also feel some pressure or soreness, especially in your jaw, as the aligners slowly move your teeth. It’s most noticeable when you first switch to a new aligner. “When I received my first tray, the pressure was very intense, especially for the first few days. I dreaded taking them out to eat,” says RealSelf member Tori Needam, 41, of Trenton, Ohio. “Changing the trays at night helped and so did taking some Advil before I went to bed.” The soreness should ease as your teeth shift into their new position.

When you’ll see results and how long they’ll last

Every case is different. Some people notice a difference in as little as two weeks, while others may need up to six months to start seeing results. Needam thought she noticed changes in her bite after just three days. That’s quite possible, says Dr. Janet Stoess-Allen, a New York City orthodontist. “Most patients become very aware of their teeth and the movements once they start using Invisalign, and many report that they can see changes from the start.” Your teeth will gradually move into position until your treatment plan is completed.

When you and your doctor are happy with the position of your teeth, you’ll get a retainer to keep them from shifting. Your results will last for as long as your teeth don’t shift. If the position of your teeth matches your last set of aligners, your retainers can be made from those, without taking new impressions of your teeth. There are several types of retainers, including Vivera from the company that makes Invisalign. Your doctor will recommend the best one for you.

Dentists on RealSelf recommend wearing your retainer full-time for three months and every night after that. “People always ask how long they have to wear the retainer, and my answer is, for as long as you want to have straight teeth,” says Dr. Davidowitz.

How much Invisalign costs

RealSelf members paid about \$5,000 on average. Your out-of-pocket cost will be affected most heavily by whether your dental insurance will help pay for it. It can also depend on whether you see an orthodontist (who specializes only in orthodontic tooth movements) or a dentist, their office location, and on the complexity and length of your treatment.

Your total cost will include:

- the lab fee for the aligners
- dental appointments to monitor your progress
- treatments to “slenderize” the enamel between the teeth, to help move the tooth further into alignment
- additional aligners, if your teeth aren’t moving according to plan

It should also include refinements at the end of your treatment, to fine-tune your results. For example, if one stubborn tooth hasn’t shifted all the way, the cost should cover more aligners to get that tooth to fully move. That’s what happened to Needam: As she was completing her treatment, she felt that her right incisor was still turned in and needed more attention. “I hope my orthodontist will be able to get that one tooth to cooperate,” she says.

Every office is different, so your cost may or may not also include your first set of retainers. There will be an additional fee for a new retainer, which most patients will need to get every year or two, depending on how well they take care of them and how much they grind or clench their teeth at night.

To clean your trays, your dentist may provide Cleaning Crystals, or you might need to buy them separately, at a cost of about \$1 a day.

Alternatives to Invisalign

- **Traditional braces** use wires and brackets to apply pressure on teeth and move them. They generally take longer than Invisalign, but they can correct more complex alignment and bite issues. They also have a higher Worth It Rating than any clear aligner.
- **ClearCorrect** is another clear-aligner brand with treatment managed by your dentist or orthodontist. The aligners are less expensive than Invisalign, but they have a lower Worth It Rating.
- **SmileDirectClub** provides clear aligners without in-person visits to a doctor. The company sends trays through the mail and allows you to manage your treatment plan online. These aligners are also cheaper than Invisalign, but they have a much lower Worth It Rating.

Lingual braces (sometimes called iBraces) are similar to traditional braces, but they’re glued to the inner surfaces of the teeth, so they’re hidden from view. They’re gaining popularity because of their aesthetic advantage, but this type of treatment tends to take the longest because the teeth move so gradually. They have a significantly lower Worth It Rating than both traditional braces and Invisalign.