



Oligodontia treatment guide

For youth and young adults
with oligodontia

Holland Bloorview
Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

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This PDF version of the oligodontia treatment guide are accessible
for screen readers and other accessible technologies.

This treatment guide is intended to remind you that ***you are not alone***. There are people who can relate to you. There are people who understand what you are going through. There are people who can help, support and love you.

This document is intended to be a short and simple document, outlining the oligodontia treatment process. If you are looking for more information, there is a longer and more detailed guide available. As you grow older, you can read the longer version to give you a deeper understanding of the treatment process.



What is oligodontia?

Oligodontia is a rare hereditary condition where six or more baby and/or adult teeth are missing.

Diagnosing oligodontia

Sometimes, oligodontia is not diagnosed properly.

Below is a quote from a Holland Bloorview client:

“We kind of noticed as I was getting older, it was harder to eat for me and I wasn’t getting teeth in. So, we went to multiple dentists around and they didn’t even know what was going on” (Elle, age 19).

There are various signs you can look out for to help with the diagnosis process.

Signs include:

- missing teeth
- delayed tooth growth
- poorly aligned teeth
- gaps between teeth
- cone-shaped teeth
- difficulty chewing
- problems with speech
- a decrease in saliva production
- absence of sweat
- disturbances in the growth of hair and nails
- nail discolouration

Treatment options

It is common for people to be confused about the treatment options for oligodontia.

“I felt in the beginning the first couple years, I was by myself, I was the advocate, I was trying to figure out what to do and what’s the best practice” (Nate, age 17).

However, it is important to remember you are not alone and your team is there to support you through the treatment process.

The following briefly outlines various treatment options possibly available to you:

Implants

Implants are placed into the jawbone to mimic tooth roots. After implants are placed into the jawbone, missing teeth can be replaced with a crown or other prosthesis. Many patients opt for implant surgery because it is a more definitive solution.

Crowns

A crown is a hollow, artificial tooth used to cover a damaged or decayed tooth. The crown restores the tooth and protects it from additional damage. Crowns are also able to cover a discoloured or misshapen tooth. A tooth that has been fixed with a crown looks and works like a natural tooth.

Dental bridges

Dental bridges bridge the gap created by one or more missing teeth. The bridge extends across an area with no teeth and is typically made up of an artificial tooth fused between two crowns. The bridge is held firmly in place by the natural teeth on each side of the missing one(s) or by dental implants. A bridge is cemented and cannot be removed.

Removable dentures

Removable dentures are removable prosthetic devices used to replace missing teeth and surrounding tissues. Two types of dentures are available: complete and partial dentures. Complete dentures are used when all natural teeth are missing, while partial dentures are used when some natural teeth are missing. They are held in the mouth by the remaining teeth or by a denture adhesive. Dentures look like natural teeth, and can improve the smile and fill out the facial appearance.

Ways to cope

Each person copes with oligodontia in a unique way. You may find it helpful to try some of the following strategies:



Take care of yourself. Find time in your day to continue doing the things you love most. Put on a pair of headphones and listen to music, paint a picture, play basketball or do whatever makes you happy.



Express your feelings. Sharing your feelings will likely make dealing with what you're going through easier. You may choose to speak to a close family member or friend. Alternatively, you can express your feelings in a diary or through art.



Physical recreation. Exercise, such as going to the gym, skating, yoga or dancing, may help relieve stress.



Ask questions. Having a good understanding of the oligodontia treatment process may increase your sense of control and comfort.

Support systems

Your support systems are there to help you and encourage you through your treatment.



Family

Many people with oligodontia find their families to be their main source of support over the course of their treatment. In fact, a lot of people feel their dental journey brought their families closer together.

“It did bring my mom and I closer because she’d be the one that would come to all my procedures. So it was nice to have her... But yeah, it did make us closer because she’d be the one that would run through everything to me on what to expect or things like that. So it did make my mom and my relationship stronger, that’s for sure...” (Molly, age 16).



Friends

Speaking with friends about oligodontia often provides people with a sense of relief and comfort.

“But I had like quite a few friends who I opened up with. And they...they were like my rock. Like, throughout high school. They really made my treatment a little bit better knowing that some people knew about it, and like were there for me and weren’t judging me” (Mia, age 15).



Educators

People with oligodontia frequently report that their teachers are accommodating and supportive throughout the oligodontia treatment process.

“I was lucky to have teachers who were pretty understanding or nice. And so it wasn’t too difficult” (Josh, age 20).



Dental team

Your dental team is available to offer support and form strong relationships with you. This bond may help you develop confidence throughout the oligodontia treatment process.

“So, the individual practitioners, Holland Bloorview, you know, as a hospital, the attention they pay, how available they make themselves, I felt was really, really good” (Oliver, age 15).

Things they don't tell you

Having oligodontia can be hard and the treatment journey is long. Everyday events that your friends take for granted like biting into an apple or sharing a bag of popcorn at a movie will likely be more challenging. You may feel stressed when going out to eat because you have to consider which foods will not break or get stuck in your appliances. It may also be harder to eat a well-balanced diet as some fruits, vegetables and proteins may be too difficult to chew. You may not want to smile in front of people with whom you are not comfortable.

But remember, having oligodontia is part of what makes you, you! You will gain perspective from the treatment process that others will not.

As a mother of three children with oligodontia explains:

“On the positive side, my kids have learned to be tough, resilient, compassionate and strong. They are great students (all in University) and supporters of people with challenges. This condition has made them better people” (Andrea, age 50).

Final outcomes

At the end of the oligodontia treatment process, people feel more confident, excited to expand their social circle, meet new people and participate in social events. They also feel highly satisfied with their smile, speech, and ability to chew.

“I think it raised my self-confidence a little bit. I never really used to smile before. But now, I will smile all the time, which is cool. That’s great. I think it’s helped with my confidence for sure” (Alex, age 22).

“I’m a lot more confident. I don’t like – I talk to people who I don’t know. Like, before it was kind of – I was just comfortable with the people I knew and knew my situation” (Ryan, age 22).

“Yeah. I’m feeling confident. I was telling my girlfriend a while ago actually, I was letting her know that it’s been a while since I’ve been able to actually eat food that I enjoy... And the second I got these implants and my new teeth, we had to go out to eat because I just want to be able to smile freely, eat freely. It’s been a while” (Charlie, age 23).

Moving forward

Throughout the oligodontia treatment journey, you, along with your family, will work with dental specialists to decide the path that is best for you. You may explore various coping mechanisms and communicate with your support systems, working to make the process a little easier. You will run into unique challenges, including eating sticky or solid foods, but these obstacles will shape you into a strong, resilient individual. You’ve got this!



For more information

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