



FOUR WAYS TO MAKE ORTHODONTIC TREATMENT MORE AFFORDABLE



by Dr. Terry Giangreco

1. Flexible Spending & HSA Savings Accounts

Using flexible spending and health savings accounts (HSA) to pay for treatment allows you to use pre-tax dollars for treatment. Many flexible spending accounts let you put up to \$2500/year toward qualified health care expenses which includes orthodontics. With HSA accounts, you may be able to pay for the entire treatment pre-tax. Using these accounts creates a significant tax advantage and can be the most powerful way to save money on your orthodontic treatment. Make sure you pay attention to your company deadlines if you plan to use flex spending dollars. Most companies require you to let them know ahead of time you plan to use flex dollars and how much you would like to save into an account. Check with your specific company, but most companies have either November or June enrollment periods. Failing to sign up in time could cost you significantly more out-of-pocket dollars to pay for your treatment. Most orthodontists offer free consultations, so be sure to get an orthodontic exam before the deadline to register for your flex account.



2. Insurance

If you have orthodontic insurance, that's fantastic! Approximately 50% of those seeking orthodontic treatment do not have the ability to take advantage of insurance benefits. Make sure to check with your employer as to what type of insurance is available to you. Many have different options for orthodontic coverage. Some insurances also now require a one-year waiting period. So, you may have to sign up now for benefits next year. If you or a family member may be interested in orthodontics in the future, check with your insurance supplier to make sure you get the most benefit from your insurance. Also, a common misconception is that you can only see an in-network orthodontist. FALSE! For almost all orthodontic insurances, you will still get the same insurance benefit regardless of whether you see an in-network doctor or not. When you visit an orthodontist, they should provide you with a complimentary insurance benefits check.



3. Ask for Flexible Financing

Most offices will offer you several options to pay for treatment. Typically, you can pay for treatment in full and save a percentage on treatment, you can put down a down payment and break payments into 1-2 years of monthly payments, or you can opt for an extended financing plan. If you choose an extended financing plan, watch for hidden fees or surprise charges if you miss a payment. You shouldn't need to pay higher than 10% APR for an extended (over 24 month payment plan). You should also have the option for shorter payment plans to have 0% APR. Companies like OrthoFi are helping doctors make treatment more and more affordable for patients by giving them many different options to customize paying for treatment.



4. Watch for Hidden Fees

When comparing prices for orthodontics, look closely at the cheapest price. Many offices offer low prices up front but hit you with fees later in treatment, making the total cost for treatment much higher. Broken bracket fees, missed appointment fees, cancellation fees, not including retainers, etc can dramatically increase the total cost of treatment. BEWARE of any office that charges additional monthly fees after a certain point. For example, many offices can start charging extra if treatment extends beyond 24 months. This actually creates an incentive for the office to keep your braces on longer so that the office can charge more. Also, lower-cost offices typically use lower-cost materials. Braces can be purchased from third-world manufacturers for a fraction of the cost of American-made braces. All braces are NOT created equal. Using a cheaper brace often leads to months or years longer in braces and 10-15 additional visits during treatment. Would you pay a few hundred dollars extra to be done with your braces sooner and to have many less trips into the office for adjustments? Consider this before selecting your orthodontist. Shopping for the cheapest orthodontic treatment in town may come with a significant cost; in dollars, your time comfort and ultimate orthodontic results.



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