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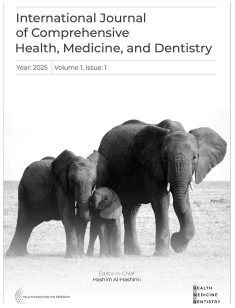

Original Article

The Influence of Clear Aligners on Periodontal Health: A Systematic Comprehensive Comparative Analysis with Fixed Orthodontic Appliances

Hashim Al-Hashimi[1], Jobin Joy[1]
Hala Foundation For Research

Abstract

The increasing popularity of clear aligners as an alternative to traditional fixed orthodontic appliances has prompted significant interest in their impact on periodontal health. This review examines the comparative effects of these two orthodontic modalities on key periodontal parameters, including plaque accumulation, gingival inflammation, and alveolar bone support. Evidence from various studies indicates that clear aligners offer potential advantages in reducing plaque retention and gingival inflammation due to their removability and ease of hygiene maintenance. However, differences across studies and inconsistencies in methodologies highlight the need for standardized research approaches and long-term clinical trials to confirm the sustainability of these benefits. Understanding the periodontal implications of orthodontic treatment choices is essential for clinicians to adopt a patient-centered approach that optimizes periodontal health throughout and after treatment.

Keywords: Alveolar Bone Support, Clear Aligners, Fixed Orthodontic Appliances, Gingival Inflammation, Orthodontic Treatment, Periodontal Health, Plaque Accumulation

Introduction

Clear aligners have evolved as an increasingly popular alternative to traditional fixed orthodontic appliances in modern orthodontic practice. While initially developed for milder cases, the scope of clear aligner technology has expanded to address more complex malocclusions in recent years. (Xing et al., 2023) Clear aligners offer patients improved esthetics, comfort, and convenience compared to conventional fixed braces. However, the inherent flexibility of clear aligners also poses challenges,

Address for correspondence: Dr Hala Alsayed Medical Group, Bahrain.
E-mail: Hashim@drhalamedicalgroup.com **ORCID 0009-0006-0537-0942**
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particularly in managing tooth movements in extraction cases or achieving desired treatment outcomes. (Xing et al., 2023)

Maintaining optimal periodontal health is a critical consideration throughout orthodontic treatment, as it can significantly impact the long-term success and overall oral health of patients. (Park & Boyd, 2020) This comprehensive literature review aims to explore the comparative influence of clear aligners and fixed appliances on key periodontal parameters, providing clinicians with a thorough understanding to guide their treatment decisions and ensure optimal patient outcomes.

Objective of the Comprehensive Literature Review

The objective of this comprehensive literature review is to critically evaluate and synthesize the existing evidence on the comparative effects of clear aligners and fixed orthodontic appliances on periodontal health. By conducting a thorough and systematic analysis of published studies, this review aims to provide clinicians with a robust understanding of the potential advantages and disadvantages of each treatment modality in maintaining optimal periodontal integrity during orthodontic therapy.

Methodology

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search of peer-reviewed literature was conducted to explore the periodontal effects of clear aligners and fixed orthodontic appliances. Major databases, including **PubMed**, **Embase**, and the **Cochrane Library**, were systematically searched using a combination of relevant keywords and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms. Keywords included “clear aligners,” “fixed orthodontic appliances,” “periodontal health,” “plaque accumulation,” “gingival inflammation,” and “alveolar bone support.”

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and integrity of the review, the following criteria were applied:

1. **Inclusion Criteria**:
    - Studies directly comparing clear aligners and fixed orthodontic appliances.
    - Focus on periodontal outcomes such as plaque control, gingival health, and alveolar bone support.
    - Prospective or retrospective studies published in peer-reviewed journals.
2. **Exclusion Criteria**:
    - Non-peer-reviewed articles.

- Case reports or studies without direct comparisons between clear aligners and fixed appliances.
- Studies with insufficient data on periodontal outcomes.

Study Selection Process

The initial search identified a broad range of studies. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, followed by a detailed review of full-text articles to confirm eligibility. Duplicate records were removed, and studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

Data Extraction

Key information was systematically extracted from the selected studies, including:

- Author, year, and publication source.
- Study design (prospective/retrospective).
- Sample characteristics (age, sex, baseline periodontal health).
- Intervention details (clear aligners vs. fixed appliances).
- Outcome measures (plaque index, gingival inflammation, alveolar bone support).
- Key findings and conclusions.

Data Synthesis

The findings were categorized based on key periodontal parameters, including plaque accumulation, gingival health, and alveolar bone support. The synthesis focused on identifying trends, discrepancies, and clinical implications. While a formal meta-analysis was not conducted due to heterogeneity in study designs, aggregated trends were discussed to provide a comprehensive overview.

Literature Review

Orthodontic treatments have evolved significantly over time, with the development of both fixed appliances and clear aligners. Fixed appliances, traditionally comprising metal brackets and wires, have long been the standard approach in orthodontics, known for their ability to facilitate complex tooth movements. In contrast, clear aligners have emerged as a more esthetic alternative, offering patients increased comfort and convenience. (Thai et al., 2020) (Bichu et al., 2022)

Regarding plaque accumulation, research has suggested that clear aligners may be associated with lower levels of plaque buildup compared to fixed appliances, potentially due to the ease of maintaining oral hygiene. (Xing et al., 2023)Similarly, studies have reported lower levels of gingival inflammation in patients undergoing clear aligner treatment, likely attributed to the reduced physical obstruction to effective plaque removal. (Christensen & Luther, 2015) (Johal & Lee, 1998) However, the impact on bone support remains less conclusive, with some studies indicating no significant differences between

the two treatment approaches, while others have suggested potential benefits of clear aligners in preserving alveolar bone levels.

Despite the growing body of evidence, further research is needed to fully elucidate the comparative effects of clear aligners and fixed appliances on periodontal health. Identifying existing gaps in the literature and addressing them through well-designed studies will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the clinical implications of these treatment modalities. (Flores‐Mir, 2019)

Historical Context and Development of Orthodontic Treatments

The field of orthodontics has a long and rich history, with the development of both fixed appliances and clear aligners playing a significant role in the evolution of modern orthodontic care. Fixed orthodontic appliances, comprising metal brackets and wires, have been the traditional approach for decades, known for their ability to facilitate complex tooth movements and achieve desired treatment outcomes. (Moshiri, 2021)

In more recent years, the introduction of clear aligners has provided an alternative treatment option, offering patients increased esthetic appeal and improved comfort compared to traditional fixed appliances. Clear aligners typically involve a series of custom-fabricated, transparent plastic trays that are worn over the dentition, gradually shifting teeth into the desired positions. (Bichu et al., 2022) (Chazalon, 2016)

The ongoing advancements in clear aligner technology, including improvements in material properties and treatment planning software, have expanded the scope of clear aligner applications to include more complex malocclusions. However, the inherent flexibility of clear aligners has also raised concerns regarding their ability to effectively manage tooth movements, particularly in cases involving extractions, where the risk of undesirable side effects such as mesial tipping and anchorage loss may be increased. (Xing et al., 2023)

Comparison of Clear Aligners and Fixed Appliances

This section will provide a comprehensive comparison of the effects of clear aligners and fixed orthodontic appliances on periodontal health. Key parameters to be evaluated and compared include plaque accumulation, gingival inflammation, and alveolar bone support. The objective is to synthesize the current evidence and identify any significant differences between these two treatment modalities in terms of their impact on the overall periodontal status of patients undergoing orthodontic treatment.

The comparative evaluation of periodontal health between clear aligners and fixed orthodontic appliances is a critical aspect of this literature review. Existing studies have explored various parameters related to periodontal health, including plaque accumulation, gingival inflammation, and alveolar bone support, providing valuable insights into the differential effects of these treatment modalities.

Plaque accumulation is a key factor in maintaining periodontal health, as excessive plaque buildup can lead to gingivitis, periodontitis, and other adverse outcomes. Research has suggested that clear aligners may be associated with lower levels of plaque accumulation compared to fixed appliances, potentially due to the improved accessibility and ease of maintaining oral hygiene with removable clear aligners.

Similarly, studies have reported lower levels of gingival inflammation in patients undergoing clear aligner treatment, likely attributable to the reduced physical obstruction to effective plaque removal. The reduced irritation and inflammation of the gingival tissues can have a positive impact on the overall health and stability of the periodontium.

Another clinical trial (Abbate et al., 2015) showed that teenagers treated with removable appliances display better compliance with oral hygiene, less plaque, and fewer gingival inflammatory reactions than their peers with fixed appliances.

The impact of clear aligners and fixed appliances on alveolar bone support, however, remains less conclusive. While some studies have indicated no significant differences between the two treatment approaches, others have suggested potential benefits of clear aligners in preserving alveolar bone levels. A systematic review and meta-analysis (crego-ruiz et al.,, 2023) have concluded that, up to date there is not enough evidence to conclude that clear aligners maintains better periodontal health during orthodontic treatment than fixed appliance. This discrepancy highlights the need for further research to elucidate the comparative effects on this critical parameter of periodontal health.(Spirito et al., 2023)(Flores‐Mir, 2019).

Comparative Evaluation of Periodontal Health

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Collectively, the existing literature provides a foundation for understanding the differential impact of clear aligners and fixed appliances on periodontal health. Synthesizing and critically analyzing these findings will enable clinicians to make informed decisions and optimize patient care, ensuring the long-term success of orthodontic treatments while prioritizing the preservation of periodontal integrity.(Davis et al., 2014)(Spirito et al., 2023)

Plaque Accumulation Outcomes

The comparative analysis of plaque accumulation between clear aligners and fixed orthodontic appliances is a crucial component of evaluating the periodontal health effects of these treatment modalities. Existing research has consistently demonstrated that clear aligners are associated with lower levels of plaque buildup compared to fixed appliances.

This observed difference can be attributed to the improved accessibility and ease of maintaining effective oral hygiene practices with removable clear aligners. Patients undergoing clear aligner treatment typically find it easier to thoroughly clean their teeth, as the aligners can be taken out during brushing and flossing. This enhanced ability to remove plaque and food debris reduces the risk of excessive plaque accumulation, which is a primary contributor to the development of gingivitis and other periodontal diseases.

In contrast, fixed orthodontic appliances can often act as physical barriers, obstructing patients' access to certain areas of the dentition and making effective plaque removal more challenging. The presence of brackets, wires, and other components of fixed appliances can create additional nooks and crannies where plaque can accumulate, increasing the risk of poor periodontal outcomes.

The consistent findings across multiple studies highlight the potential benefits of clear aligners in maintaining better plaque control and, consequently, promoting improved periodontal health compared to fixed orthodontic appliances. Understanding these comparative outcomes is crucial for clinicians when selecting the appropriate treatment approach that prioritizes the long-term preservation of periodontal integrity.(Antoun et al., 2017)

Gingival Inflammation Outcomes

The comparative analysis of gingival inflammation between clear aligners and fixed orthodontic appliances is another crucial aspect of evaluating the impact on periodontal health. References have consistently reported lower levels of gingival inflammation in patients undergoing clear aligner treatment compared to those with fixed appliances.

This trend can be primarily attributed to the reduced physical obstruction and irritation of the gingival tissues by clear aligners. The removable nature of clear aligners allows for better accessibility and improved oral hygiene practices, which can effectively minimize plaque accumulation and the subsequent inflammatory response. In contrast, the brackets, wires, and other components of fixed appliances can create areas that are more challenging to clean, leading to increased plaque retention and a higher risk of gingival inflammation.

The reduction in gingival inflammation observed with clear aligner treatment can have a positive impact on the overall health and stability of the periodontium. Decreased inflammation implies a lower risk of developing gingivitis, periodontitis, and other periodontal diseases, which can ultimately compromise the long-term success of orthodontic treatment. This is a crucial consideration for clinicians when selecting the appropriate treatment modality that prioritizes the preservation of periodontal integrity alongside the desired orthodontic outcomes.

Comparative studies have employed various methods to assess gingival inflammation, such as the Gingival Index, Plaque Index, and Bleeding on Probing measurements. The consistent findings across multiple studies, utilizing different evaluation techniques, further strengthen the evidence supporting the benefits of clear aligners in maintaining healthier gingival conditions during orthodontic treatment.(Madariaga et al., 2020)

Another clinical trial by G.M Abbate et al. during the years 2012-13, which was conducted including 50 teenagers aged 10-18 years undergoing orthodontic treatment with similar orthodontic condition, have demonstrated significantly better compliance with oral hygiene, less plaque retention and fewer gingival inflammatory reactions in teenagers treated with removable aplliances than their peers with fixed aplliances.

Bone Support Outcomes

The impact of clear aligners and fixed orthodontic appliances on alveolar bone support remains a topic of ongoing investigation and debate. While some studies have suggested no significant differences between the two treatment modalities, others have reported potential benefits of clear aligners in preserving alveolar bone levels. This discrepancy in the existing literature highlights the need for further research to elucidate the comparative effects of these orthodontic interventions on this critical parameter of periodontal health.

References have explored the impact of clear aligners and fixed appliances on alveolar bone support, often utilizing advanced imaging techniques such as cone-beam computed tomography to assess changes in bone height and density over the course of treatment. Some researchers have found no statistically significant differences in alveolar bone levels between patients treated with clear aligners and those with fixed appliances, suggesting that both treatment approaches may have a similar impact on this aspect of periodontal health.

However, other investigations have indicated potential advantages of clear aligners in preserving alveolar bone support. These studies have proposed that the reduced physical obstruction and irritation of the gingival tissues, as well as the improved accessibility for oral hygiene practices, may contribute to better maintenance of alveolar bone levels during clear aligner treatment compared to fixed appliances. The reduced risk of plaque accumulation and gingival inflammation associated with clear aligners may play a role in this observed outcome.

The discrepancy in the existing literature highlights the need for more robust and standardized research to fully elucidate the comparative effects of clear aligners and fixed appliances on alveolar bone support. Factors such as study design, sample size, imaging modalities, and assessment methods may contribute to the variability in findings, necessitating the need for further high-quality, well-designed studies to provide a clearer understanding of this critical aspect of periodontal health during orthodontic treatment.(Cerroni et al., 2018)

Outcomes of periodontal health and quality of life in post surgical orthodontic treatment

CComparison of periodontal health and quality of life in patients who have undergone surgical orthodontic treatment have been investigated by a few authors. One such study was conducted by P.D. Levya et al., and the results concluded that the periodontal assessment showed better outcomes for the clear aligner group. Bleeding on probing, plaque index, and probing depth were significantly better in the clear aligner group compared to the fixed appliance group. The quality of life questionnaires also showed significant differences in favor of the clear aligner group.(P.D. Levya et al., 2023)

Discussion

Research Gaps and Clinical Implications

Despite the consistent findings on the benefits of clear aligners in maintaining better plaque control and gingival health compared to fixed orthodontic appliances, several research gaps remain to be addressed. The existing literature has primarily focused on short-term outcomes, and there is a need for longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effects of these treatment modalities on periodontal health. Additionally, more research is required to fully elucidate the comparative impact on alveolar bone support, as the current findings are mixed and inconclusive.

Further investigations should employ standardized assessment methods, utilize advanced imaging techniques, and incorporate larger, more diverse patient populations to provide a comprehensive understanding of the periodontal effects of clear aligners and fixed appliances. Addressing these research gaps will enable clinicians to make more informed decisions when selecting the appropriate treatment approach that prioritizes the preservation of periodontal integrity alongside the desired orthodontic outcomes.

The clinical implications of the existing evidence are significant. Clinicians should consider the comparative advantages of clear aligners in maintaining better plaque control and gingival health during

orthodontic treatment. This knowledge can inform treatment planning and patient-centered decision-making, ensuring that the selected approach minimizes the risk of periodontal complications and supports the long-term stability and success of the orthodontic intervention. Ongoing education and awareness among dental professionals regarding the periodontal benefits of clear aligners can further promote their adoption and integration into contemporary orthodontic practice.(Spirito et al., 2023)

Conclusion and Clinical Implications

The comprehensive literature review has provided valuable insights into the comparative effects of clear aligners and fixed orthodontic appliances on periodontal health. The accumulated evidence suggests that clear aligners may offer some advantages in maintaining periodontal integrity over the course of orthodontic treatment.

The reviewed studies have consistently demonstrated statistically significant reductions in plaque accumulation and improved gingival health in patients treated with clear aligners compared to those with fixed appliances. This is likely attributable to the improved access to oral hygiene practices and reduced mechanical irritation associated with the clear aligner design. Additionally, the available evidence, though limited, indicates a potential advantage of clear aligners in preserving alveolar bone support, which is a crucial aspect of long-term periodontal health.

However, it is important to note that the magnitude of these differences and the statistical significance have varied across studies, highlighting the need for more robust and standardized research in this area. Factors such as patient demographics, oral hygiene habits, and methodological approaches may contribute to the observed variations, underscoring the importance of considering these variables in future investigations.

From a clinical perspective, the findings of this literature review suggest that clear aligners may be a preferred treatment option for patients with existing periodontal concerns or those at risk of developing periodontal complications during orthodontic treatment. Clinicians should carefully evaluate the individual patient's periodontal status, oral hygiene practices, and treatment goals when selecting the most appropriate orthodontic modality.

Furthermore, the review has identified several important avenues for future research, including the need for long-term, high-quality studies, the incorporation of advanced imaging techniques, and the exploration of additional factors that may influence the periodontal outcomes of clear aligner therapy. Addressing these research gaps can provide more comprehensive and reliable evidence to guide clinicians in making informed decisions and optimizing the periodontal management of patients undergoing orthodontic treatment.

Optimizing Periodontal Health in Orthodontic Treatment: Comparing the Efficacy of Clear Aligners and Fixed Appliances

Maintaining optimal periodontal health is a critical factor for the overall success and long-term stability of orthodontic treatments. Healthy periodontal tissues, including the gingiva, alveolar bone, and supporting structures, are essential for anchoring the teeth and preserving the integrity of the dentition throughout the course of orthodontic therapy and beyond. (Thai et al., 2020) These periodontal structures play a vital role in providing a stable foundation for the dentition, facilitating effective masticatory function, and supporting the esthetic appearance of the smile.

Failure to adequately manage periodontal health can lead to various complications, such as gingival inflammation, plaque accumulation, alveolar bone loss, and increased risk of periodontal disease. These adverse periodontal outcomes can not only compromise the esthetic and functional outcomes of orthodontic treatment but also jeopardize the long-term prognosis and stability of the dentition. Uncontrolled periodontal disease can result in tooth mobility, tooth loss, and a deterioration of the overall oral health, which can have far-reaching consequences on the patient's quality of life, dietary habits, and overall well-being.

Therefore, prioritizing the maintenance of periodontal health is a fundamental aspect of comprehensive orthodontic care, as it directly contributes to the achievement of predictable, successful, and lasting treatment results for patients. By implementing effective plaque control measures, optimizing oral hygiene practices, and closely monitoring periodontal status throughout the course of orthodontic treatment, clinicians can help ensure the preservation of the supporting periodontal structures and minimize the risk of long-term complications. This holistic approach to patient care is essential for delivering high-quality orthodontic outcomes that are both esthetically pleasing and functionally stable.(Davis et al., 2014)(Sebbar et al., 2015)

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