

Orthodontic Office Parking: How Many Spaces Do You Need?

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Parking and access to your orthodontic suite from a parking area is a vitally important issue for your practice. It is as equally important for new buildings as well as leased space. You want to discourage patients from describing to potential patients how difficult it is to get from their cars to your office as it can have a negative effect on your practice. In addition, a challenging (or expensive) parking situation is not a good selling point when finding or retaining good employees.

Many orthodontic patients are children. Parents like to get in and out of an office with relatively ease. People are put-off by having to endlessly search for parking stalls, having to walk long distances, having to parallel park on a nearby street (especially with meters that have to be fed often), having to trudge through snow or water, having to navigate through confusing parking structures, having to walk up or down steep grades, having to walk through poorly lit parking lots, having to cross busy intersections, or having to park in nearby parking lots of other buildings.

It is not uncommon to find orthodontic practices with inadequate parking.

How Inadequate Parking Occurs

Reasons for Inadequate Parking In New Buildings

1. Some architects and/or developers provide city or county parking code minimums as opposed to providing enough spaces for the individual needs of your practice.
2. Many orthodontists do not know how many spaces their practice

needs and subsequently do not how to direct their architect. If their architect is inexperienced with orthodontic building design, they may not be familiar with the needs for your practice.

3. Some purchase land before studying if the property is suitably sized to meet the needs of their practice and end up with an inadequate parking numbers. Many orthodontists are simply not aware of all the issues that go into calculating the size of property they need for their building. They may not have calculated the amounts of land needed for on-site drainage; building, street and utility setbacks; building footprint size; trash; landscaping areas; etc. To avoid costly surprises, hire an experienced orthodontic architect prior to purchasing land for a new orthodontic building.
4. For buildings in snowy areas, some architects do not consider how many stalls will be lost to snow piles from plowing and end up with inadequate amounts in the cold months.

Reasons for Inadequate Parking in Leased-Space Multi-Tenant Buildings

1. Your building tenant neighbors will come and go. If future tenants have more intense parking needs than those of current tenants, you may find your parking lot very full in the future.
2. The building may simply not provide enough spaces due to poor design criteria when the building was originally built. To help ensure

your parking needs are met when in a multi-tenant building, try to negotiate a minimum number of signed and reserved stalls for your practice.

3. Adjacent buildings with inadequate parking may use the parking dedicated for your building as overflow. While this may be wrong, it can be painfully difficult to monitor and control.

The location of an office, the popularity of a location, the denseness of adjacent development, land costs, etc. may ultimately leave some with little choice in finding an office with adequate parking. Patients accessing offices under these circumstances will most likely not view the situation negatively.

Whatever your situation, make sure you appropriately account for the current and future anticipated needs of your practice before signing a lease or finding property for a new building.

Calculating Your Parking Needs

There are no hard formulas or “rules-of-thumb” when it comes to calculating orthodontic office parking numbers. Every new building will need to meet the minimum requirements set forth by local code and planning agencies, but these often do not meet the needs of tenants.

For an orthodontic practice, you will want to simply provide enough parking stalls that satisfy code requirements *and* the needs for your practice. Calculate numbers based on current and future needs and include anticipated needs in your current calculations.

To calculate the needs for your practice, add the numbers of your total staff, treatment chairs, waiting room chairs, space(s) for handicap access (which

usually takes a double space), a space for deliveries, and include allowances for optional overflow space. Assume that every chair in the building is used (unless you have good reason not to) when making your final calculation.

Example:

The following example assumes a 3,000 square-foot, 5 chair orthodontic practice, with 1 exam room and 1 records room, 10 employees, and a conference room for 12 (after hours use only):

Total Staff (the max number at your office at any given time)	10
Total Treatment Chairs	5
Records Room Chairs	1
Exam Room Chairs	1
Waiting Room Chairs	12
Handicap Parking Space	2
Space for Deliveries, etc. (5 minute parking)	1
Overflow	?
TOTAL	32+

It is fair to assume that if you have 5 treatment chairs filled with children, there will be a parent with each of them, and possibly other siblings. If this is the case, calculating a parking space for every waiting room chair and every treatment chair may be overkill but will guarantee that your parking count is adequate. If you feel safe assuming that you will have children in most or all treatment chairs at all times, you may reasonably assume it is safe to reduce the number of parking stalls accordingly. Always try to provide enough parking for the worst case scenario. Remember, your practice may change over the years. You may have more adult patients in the future or you may sell the building and your practice to another orthodontist with different needs. I have

yet to hear an orthodontist complain about having too much parking.

Summary

Every practice has different needs. Before you build new or lease a new space; make sure you have taken your real parking into account. Contact an experienced orthodontic architect *before* you purchase land to help determine appropriate site size, taking into account appropriate parking numbers to satisfy codes and the needs of your practice. If there is no “on-street” parking available near your office, it is critical that your parking lot contain an appropriate number of accessible and convenient parking stalls for your staff and patients.

Remember, when in doubt, always overestimate your parking needs. Also, keep in mind future expansion needs. Your chances for a successful project improve greatly when you thoughtfully plan in advance.