As a person's situation started to take off in the 1990s. Although consumers could opt for less noticeable orthodontics by attaching the wire to the brackets, people also wanted to speed up the treatment process. With the advent of new materials and technology, braces such as SmartClip and Clarity SL braces, the ceramic brackets are more visually appealing than metal, and in my office, we've found that treatment usually takes just 14-18 months.

People typically wear conventional braces for 18-24 months, depending on the amount of work to be done and how well they follow the treatment plan. In addition to faster overall treatment, self-ligating braces may also free up some of your valuable time during treatment. With no elastics to change, most visits are quicker and there are fewer appointments to fit in your busy schedule. According to orthodontist Dr. Gary R. Gardner in Plano, N.Y., "If you're used to self-ligation, you'll probably be surprised by how much time you save.

Another reason to consider self-ligating braces is a cleaner mouth. Cosmetically, the elastic bands used with conventional braces can discolor and stretch, drawing unwanted attention to your mouth. On the other hand, if your level of hygiene is adequate, elastic bands can trap food and harbor bacteria, which promote tooth decay. They also need brushing more difficult, making clean braces, teeth and gums a challenge.

"Getting rid of the elastic ligatures is a huge plus for both oral hygiene," notes Dr. Patrice Pelier, an orthodontist in Quebec, Canada. "Self-ligating braces help patients keep their braces and teeth cleaner than appliances that require elastic bands."

If you are considering braces for your child or yourself, this is an exciting time. There are more choices than ever, but many people may not realize there are many different types. Conventional braces are still a good option, but you may want to explore if newer options are right for you. Do some research to learn about what is available so you can discuss with your orthodontist the type of braces you want. Of course, treatment times and appointments will depend on the requirements of each orthodontic case.

To learn more about the latest advancements in braces, such as SmartClip and Clarity SL braces, visit www.3MBraces.com.