



# Brace yourself!

It's never too late to straighten your teeth, and braces are not the metal monsters they once were. Jack Hay explores the cosmetic dentistry that could change your life

**P**erfect, even teeth are the essential ingredient to a winning smile, a smile that, according to the research, can have an impact on your personal and professional life – and can even help your chances of success when applying for a job.

However, without a little assistance, broad, white, pearly-teeth smiles are a rare commodity, and as a result many people are increasingly turning to orthodontics – the art of straightening teeth.

Unlike the British, the Americans take their mouths very seriously. They spend thousands of dollars on their teeth, as they do on the rest of their bodies.

In the US, cosmetic dentistry is a way of life; if you don't like your teeth, you change them. While we are certainly following in American footsteps in terms of other forms of cosmetic surgery, the British public is still largely reluctant to

shell out for dental work if it is 'only' to do with appearance.

However, things are gradually beginning to change and visits to the dentist are not just the 'drill and fill' sessions they once were, and teeth straightening is not limited to the

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brace-wearing children we knew in the school playground.

Orthodontics, or cosmetic dentistry for adults can be extremely effective; indeed many patients who have treatment on their teeth find that afterwards, the entire shape of their face is changed, as well as their confidence and personality.

## Why have it done?

Many of the problems associated with crooked teeth, such as crowding, gaps or protruding front teeth, are genetic; others can be acquired due to thumb-sucking, dental disease or premature tooth loss.

Nearly all patients request orthodontic treatment for aesthetic reasons, but there are also sound health reasons for having straight teeth.

Crooked teeth and malocclusions (bad bites – when your teeth don't meet correctly) can cause jaw joint problems, uneven wear on teeth surfaces, difficulty in chewing and, in the long term, damage to the supporting bone and gum tissue.

There's also a growing body of evidence to support that misalignment can cause migraine, back pain and many other problems.

Crowded, overlapping teeth are difficult to keep clean, which can lead to decay,



### Happy clients give a smile!

*Joanna Bridge, 28, had two years' treatment at TotalOrthodontics and was amazed at the results after just three months. 'I could see a difference week by week, which was a great encouragement', she says. Joanna had treatment to both her top and bottom teeth and now has fixed braces. She hadn't even realised that braces could be invisibly fitted behind the teeth instead of on the front.*



*Laura Symons, 32, had both her upper and lower teeth straightened out in just over a year. To achieve this, Laura wore clear brackets at the top and bottom and thinks it was the best thing she ever did. She says: 'Easily better value than a year's new wardrobe of clothes, as the benefits of it last forever!' As you can see from these 'before' and 'after' photographs, the difference is very clear and she now has a 'Hollywood' smile.*



*Jackie Neal, 47, had wrongly assumed that it was too late to do anything about her teeth until she changed dentists. Her new dentist advised her to see an orthodontist and her husband then encouraged her to start with the treatment. Now she is ten months into her treatment and is already delighted with the progress and as these photographs show, there's already a visible difference. If you're older, it may not be too late to change.*



*Fiona Matthews, 37, considered having her teeth looked at 12 years ago, but it seemed too complicated. She finally started her treatment on both lower and top teeth in October 2004 and finished just one year later. Fiona is delighted with the results.*

### What about teeth straightening?

As time goes by, your teeth may tend to shift. This can happen to adults who had orthodontic treatment when they were younger. The most common result is some crowding or rotations of front teeth. The Inman Aligner is claimed to help your teeth to their ideal position with minimal hassle, expense and time and without the need for braces. It can be removed and inserted easily. It won't treat all orthodontic cases, but works well for mild and moderate crowding cases involving the front teeth. Treatment time takes from four to six weeks. Dr Til Qureshi at Dental Elegance claims to be the first UK dentist to use the Inman Aligner. To find out if you are suitable, call 020 8850 8613. More on teeth straightening in the next issue.

gum disease and eventually tooth loss. The sooner treatment is carried out, the less the risk of developing such problems later on in life.

**Keith Underwood**, an orthodontic specialist from Total Orthodontics, which covers the South East of England ([www.totalorthodontics.co.uk](http://www.totalorthodontics.co.uk)) believes that no matter how bad the problem, something can always be done for a patient's smile.

'It may not be possible to make it absolutely perfect,' he says, 'but I believe it will always be possible to improve the cosmetic appearance.' He is seeing a growing contingent of adults prepared to wear a brace in return for the long-term gain of both dental health and an attractive smile.

practitioner will also have undergone two to three years' extensive postgraduate training in orthodontics.

Your very first appointment with the orthodontist will probably just be a discussion about your problem, what you would like to achieve and whether he or she can help you.

A series of investigations will follow, including taking impressions of your teeth and X-rays of the teeth and jaws, both front and side on. From these X-rays, the orthodontist will produce tracings, measuring the angles of your teeth to one another and how they measure up in relationship with your nose, lips and jaw, and work out the treatment plan and corrective appliance

for regular checks and adjustments as the teeth gradually move into place. This is a completely natural process: The gentle pressure on the teeth slowly pushes them through the bone, wearing it away on one side, depositing new bone on the other.

Once the teeth have been moved into their correct position, you'll need a retaining brace to hold them in place and prevent them slipping back again for a while longer.

### Your brace

Many people are put off orthodontics by the prospect of wearing an unsightly brace, but modern versions are far more discreet than the metal mouthfuls our school friends suffered.

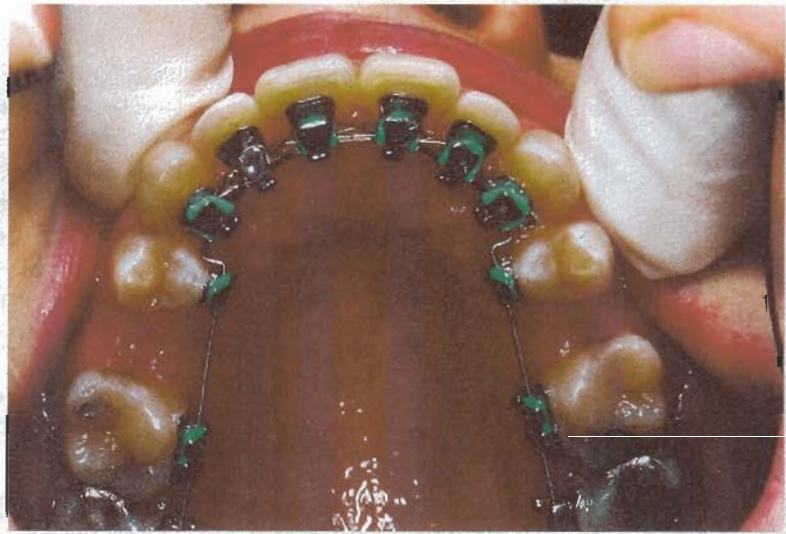
### How much will it cost?

The National Health Service provides orthodontics for children with moderate problems, but adults will almost always have to go for private treatment.

The cost is usually spread over the course of treatment and will depend on the region where you live, the individual orthodontist and the complexity of the case. You should expect to pay between £3500 and £4500 for a full brace top and bottom.

You get what you pay for – a specialist may cost you more, but his expertise should ensure you get a superior result. Don't be afraid to ask to see examples of his work. Most dentists and orthodontists take 'before' and 'after' photos and these will give you a good idea of what can be achieved.

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### What to expect

Orthodontics is a long-term treatment, usually taking between 12 months and two years – a time period that recent advances and techniques in brace design have significantly reduced from a few years ago.

Although there are a few general dental practitioners who have had some training in orthodontics, most will refer you to a specialist if you need to have comprehensive orthodontic treatment. Not only will the specialist's practice be limited just to orthodontics, but the

needed.

You will also be told the cost. This will very likely sound a lot, but remember you will be spreading it over the period of treatment, which won't be so bad.

If your problem is overcrowding, it may be necessary for one or more teeth to be extracted before the brace is fitted, and for this to be done you will go back to your own dentist first. At a third meeting, your brace or braces will be fitted – a process of adjusting and attaching that may take one or two hours. Then you will be sent off for the brace to do its work, returning

Braces can be fixed or removable, though the fixed are more effective. They can be supplied with white coatings to blend with the teeth or even 'invisible' appliances, fitted on the inside of the teeth and designed to work from the inside out.

Wearing the brace should not inhibit your lifestyle. Orthodontics is about cooperation and partnership – you need to be motivated and work with your specialist to make sure your treatment is a success.

You can visit the [Total Orthodontics website at www.totalorthodontics.co.uk](http://www.totalorthodontics.co.uk) or call the British Orthodontic Society on 020 7353 8580