



Smile and the world **SMILES WITH YOU**

CAROLINE HARDY
uncovers the science behind
orthodontics and the
impact one makes when
flashing those pearly whites

FIVE years ago when Tom Cruise took his son to have his teeth checked, the film star ended up in the dentist's chair himself.

The orthodontist noticed that although Cruise's teeth were perfectly straight, his bite needed to be adjusted as his teeth were in danger of cracking due to misalignment.

Cruise's grin is one of the most famous in the world and helped create his high profile, so the superstar had no hesitation in being fitted with orthodontic braces to correct the problem – even at the age of 39.

Other celebrities said to have worn braces as adults include Diana Ross and Whoopi Goldberg, while more than 70 per cent of American teenagers wear them at some time and also think nothing of it.

Unlike the British, the Americans have always taken their mouths very seriously, with perfect, even teeth seen as an essential

ingredient in the bid for a winning smile. Indeed, cosmetic dentistry is seen as a way of life.

Some Hollywood stars are recognised by their megawatt smiles alone (think Julia Roberts) and now, it seems, the size, shape and look of your teeth are becoming just as important this side of the pond.

It used to be teenagers who kept their mouths firmly closed so as not to reveal a pair of metal train tracks, but braces have come a long way since then.

Orthodontics are becoming big business in the UK, with adults of all ages now looking to improve their smile for many reasons – to increase their self-confidence, improve their career prospects or sometimes, just to mimic the look worn by their favourite film or TV star.

Today's modern braces include tooth coloured braces, clear removable aligners and – the latest technique – lingual braces that are hidden inside the teeth and are virtually invisible. So discreet are these braces that people in the public eye have been able to straighten their teeth largely unnoticed. Among those said to have been treated this way are the actresses Kelly Brook and Sadie Frost and Channel 4 presenter Steve Jones.

So what exactly is orthodontics? The word literally, means straight teeth. The process

involves the use of orthodontic appliances – braces – to gently move teeth to straighten them and improve the bite.

One of the biggest orthodontics partnerships in the South East, Total Orthodontics, which has practices at Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Sevenoaks, has seen a steady rise in people wanting cosmetic dentistry to help perfect their smiles.

Technology has moved at a vast rate over the past 15 years or so and the British have been quick to pick up on it, says Richard George, a director and orthodontist specialist at the Tunbridge Wells branch.

“Although America is the birthplace of orthodontics, Europe is now on a par with the US in terms of being conscious of how they can be used to improve looks. It is very demand-led here.

“The stigma surrounding braces is virtually gone – patients are often desperate to get them! That is inevitably good for us, because we get more patients willing to accept treatment to straighten teeth, not just for cosmetic reasons, but also to correct other problems.”

Clear, removable aligners and tooth coloured braces are popular, but Mr George sees lingual braces as being at the forefront of future orthodontics. “Lots of celebrities who don't want anyone to know they are →

wearing these braces have them, as they can't be seen from the outside. They are more expensive, as each brace is custom-made and because of the precision used to fit them, but they are extremely popular."

Then there is the popular invisalign brace for adults only, which is a transparent brace that can be removed. It has to be replaced every two or three weeks, as each aligner changes the shape of the teeth a little at a time, and about 20 or 30 will be needed to get results, says Mr George.

Orthodontic treatment can take anywhere from six months to two years to complete, depending on the complexity of the problem, but there is a 100 per cent success rate, says Mr George.

"We would never start a treatment if we're not going to be successful," he says. "It is quite a leap to have a brace fitted as an adult so we always work closely with the patient's dentist to make sure the treatment is right before we start.

"The great thing about orthodontics is that we're not adding anything to the mouth, just adjusting the existing dentistry to its best advantage. We improve what is already there."

Having never given my mouth much thought, I asked Richard George what he would recommend to improve my smile.

After examining my teeth, he pronounced that it seemed I had looked after my teeth very well over the years, something my dentist of 25-years standing would probably have been pleased to hear.

However, he added, slight crowding in my lower incisors could be straightened quickly by several techniques and he recommended fitting a simple brace to align the offending teeth.

As it was a simple problem, he said five or six visits over six months might be all that would be needed, followed by a retainer being fixed in to ensure that the teeth wouldn't move again.

■ Total Orthodontics have branches in Brighton, Crawley, Horsham, Haywards Heath, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Sevenoaks, and offer both NHS and private treatments. Contact them on www.totalorthodontics.co.uk or telephone the Tunbridge Wells branch on 01892 543500.



THE DENTIST'S CHAIR: The Total Orthodontics team outside their building on Mount Ephraim in Tunbridge Wells. From left are dental nurse Helen Lindup, orthodontist Richard George, practice manager Tania Riggs and receptionist Sarah Johnston

