

Straighter teeth for healthier, happier patients

With nearly half of UK adults (45 per cent) unhappy with the alignment of their teeth, it's no surprise that orthodontic treatment is on the rise. Interestingly, the YouGov survey, conducted on behalf of National Orthodontic Week (NOW) in 2010, also found that 20 per cent of respondents would consider having some form of orthodontic treatment.

That's quite a drop. From 45 per cent of people being unhappy with the way their teeth look to just 20 per cent being prepared to do something about it. Now, why could that be? There are two main issues that discourage patients from seeking treatment: cost and embarrassment of the way it would make them look, but both of these matters can be dealt with very easily. As demand for adult orthodontic treatment continues to grow, so too does the development of new products and techniques to meet that need.

Celebrities such as Tom Cruise, Nicolas Cage and Katherine Heigl have all shown that orthodontics is not just for children. However, although they have effectively been ambas-

sadors for adult orthodontics (simply by undergoing treatment and being photographed wearing braces), there is also the suggestion that treatment for the stars is likely to be too expensive for the general public. In actual fact, there are a number of treatment options to choose from, ranging widely in price.

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Fear of embarrassment is another key issue for patients, but modern treatments are incredibly subtle. It's no longer necessary for patients to endure conspicuous metal 'train tracks' on the front

of their teeth. Innovations in adult orthodontics have led to treatment such as understated tooth-coloured fixed braces, or

lingual braces that are fitted to the back of the teeth, or even removable clear aligners.

Perhaps the patient is worried about broaching the subject with you in case they are judged to be 'making a fuss

over nothing', assuming that you would tell them if their un-

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even teeth needed treatment. Or they may be afraid of experiencing pain. These obstacles, and indeed many more, to treatment can be overcome by developing effective patient communication and education.

The first and most obvious benefit to orthodontic treatment is a more attractive appearance and greater confidence. And this enhances every

aspect of a person's life from their career prospects to their personal relationships. In addition to this, there are the health implications. Optimum dental function reduces teeth grinding and ensures that food is chewed properly, helping the patient's digestion of meals and snacks. Some patients with severe malalignment may even feel they have to avoid certain types of food and so, following treatment, are able to enjoy a wider variety of nourishment

and the health benefits of an improved nutritional intake.

Straighter teeth are much easier to clean than those that are crowded, as a toothbrush can reach more of the surface area of each tooth. The interproximal areas can also be accessed effortlessly, allowing cleaning with floss or interdental brushes. If the patient lacks adequate spacing such cleaning proves difficult and leads to inefficient hygiene, or the patient

gives up altogether out of sheer frustration. In all probability, patients with crooked teeth will have more plaque build up and are at greater risk of gingivitis and tooth loss.

Improving teeth alignment also balances the force of the bite more evenly. With a crooked dentition, some teeth are taking more of the force than others, creating problems such as uneven wear and even causing headaches or jaw pain.

Patients who feel they are saving money by avoiding orthodontic treatment now might be heading for much more expensive dental procedures later in life.

If you are thinking about referring orthodontic treatment for your patients, contact a referral practice with the necessary expertise such as the London Smile Clinic, and discover the best treatment options available for each individual case. Led by Specialist Orthodontist Dr Preet Bhogal, the clinic develops close working relationships with referring dentists to ensure the



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best possible patient care for the whole duration of the referred treatment. From the initial assessment to the day the braces come off, the clinic seeks authorisation and approval from the referring dentist at every stage.

Effective orthodontic treatment delivered by a specialist dramatically improves patients' lives. Consider it from their perspective. A GDP might see what appears to be a very minor case of uneven dentition and not think it worth referring. The patient, on the other hand, looks in the mirror every day and notices every perceived flaw. To the patient, achieving straighter teeth is nothing short of a transformation. Just imagine how patients with very crooked teeth would feel if they had the opportunity to gain a more beautiful smile. That power lies in your hands. [DT](#)

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