

Healthy smiles

Braced for trouble-free smiling

More adults are having their teeth straightened - but today's orthodontic techniques are so discreet you probably haven't noticed, writes **Jesse Matheson**.



People of all ages can seek specialist help to get their teeth straightened.

One of the first things we notice about people is their smile. That's one reason to take care of your pearly whites.

But a toothbrush, floss and mouthwash can't fix every problem. If your teeth don't sit straight, you can seek out specialist help — whatever your age.

Orthodontists don't only put children's and teenagers' teeth in their proper place. Their treatments and systems transform adult mouths too.

Forget the old chunky metal headsets. Today's treatments are so good they look and feel as though you're wearing nothing.

That explains why men and women are lining up at specialist clinics for braces, says

Melbourne orthodontist Dr Geoffrey Wexler.

"Because of the improvement in orthodontic engineering ... adults who, for social reasons, would have never considered visible braces are now keen to have their teeth straightened," he says.

"We have people coming in for their weddings and we can hide the braces behind the teeth. They can even take their aligners out."

Geoffrey Wexler Orthodontist clinics (at Toorak and Frankston) offer a range of products and treatments, including the popular Invisalign system of nearly invisible aligners, ceramic brackets and the

SureSmile lingual braces add-ons, which go behind the teeth and are totally hidden.

Behind-the-teeth braces make up a third of Wexler's work.

"SureSmile is a braces enhancement system ... it means that braces can go behind the teeth and be just as fast and effective as any system," Wexler says.

Invisalign is another "fantastic system for the right people", he says. "Invisalign requires plastic on the front of the teeth that has a bit of a grey tinge."

Whatever the system used, straightening teeth requires a lot of skill, Wexler says. That's why it's vital people do their research and ensure their specialist is the real deal.

"All these educational providers have been coming along to general dentists saying, 'We'll teach you to do braces in a weekend' ... But orthodontics is an extremely sophisticated and complicated thing to do well," he says.

Australian Dental Association (ADA) president and orthodontist Dr Rick Olive agrees. He says there are ways to check up on your practitioner.

"The Dental Board of Australia website allows anyone to enter their dental practitioner's name and it will provide information.

"Some general dentists have an interest in orthodontics, but they have not done the three years of university training to be a specialist orthodontist and so are not identified."

The average cost for braces is about \$7000, according to the ADA, but it can be more or less than that, depending on how complicated the treatment is and the system used.

If you think it sounds expensive, bear in mind that the benefits aren't only about superficial appearance.

There are huge health dividends to keeping your teeth on the straight and narrow.

"People who have orthodontic treatment when they're young have healthier teeth for the remainder of their life," Wexler says. "When teeth are crossed over they are very hard to clean well and you can get gum recession in between the teeth.

"Getting your teeth straightened as well as you can, as early as you can, is a lifelong investment in health and wellbeing."



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