

A Beautiful Smile

Can Mean a Healthier Person

By Stephanie Smith, DMD

WITH ALL THE CELEBRITIES FLASHING BEAUTIFUL SMILES from television shows and magazine covers, fabulous straight white teeth have become the norm. Many adults, however, start the day with a headache instead of a smile. Increasing evidence shows that all too often, certain issues are related to the way teeth bite together, as well as the way they look. Crooked teeth, plaque catchers, dental food traps and “clicking” noises can indicate the need for orthodontic intervention. In other words, many adults need braces or orthodontic treatment to straighten their teeth for their health as much as for esthetic reasons.

Mis-alignment of the upper and lower jaw, and associated tooth related problems can cause a host of symptoms. There are the obvious issues such as clenching or grinding teeth. More vague symptoms such as headaches, ear aches, pain behind the eyes, and ringing in the ears can indicate an unhealthy relationship between the upper and lower jaw. Because these symptoms masquerade as other conditions, many people travel from physician to medical specialist in search of answers without considering a visit to the dentist.



Adults who experience these symptoms may need to visit a dentist or orthodontist to address an underlying jaw and joint condition called TMJ Syndrome. Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders have been called the “Great Imposters” due to the fact that so many of the symptoms overlap other symptoms that mimic other conditions. Many adults discover such a disorder only when they consider orthodontics to create that desired dazzling smile. In reality, a visit to the dentist can simultaneously address the way your smile looks and your jaw and bite feel.

Change Your Teeth, Change a Cycle

Often, with the day-to-day demands of working, caring for children and a household, many adults (especially women) put themselves last on the list. This can lead to increased stress and can start a vicious cycle that can worsen a pre-existing TMJ disorder. Often, adult orthodontics is a healthcare necessity. Earlier intervention is advantageous and can significantly improve long-term results. The goal of adult orthodontics is not only to create an esthetic outcome, but also to resolve the symptoms related to TMJ dysfunction.

Each patient must be diagnosed, and his or her treatment planned, by a dental professional with special knowledge of adult orthodontics, temporomandibular joint disorders and esthetic dentistry. There are a number of adult orthodontic plans to treat TMJ-related symptoms, achieve a smile makes you appear more youthful and improve the jaw relationship that could be causing worn teeth or shoulder and neck pain.

- ▶ **A nighttime mouth guard** can correct minor jaw and tooth problems. These may be worn only on a short term basis when symptoms indicate it is necessary.
- ▶ **Braces**, traditionally metal brackets bonded to individual teeth, now comprise clear brackets and white wires. An excellent choice when more aggressive tooth movement is necessary for long-term success, braces resolve symptoms related to TMJ disorders and create a beautiful smile without concerns of appearing as a “metal mouth.”
- ▶ **“Invisalign” or “Invisalign Teen”** is the most recent advance and invisible treatment to straighten teeth and repair TMJ syndrome without braces. Align Technology’s patented system uses a series of custom-made, state-of-the-art, computer generated trays that are invisible. They fit your teeth like a second skin and each set of trays incrementally moves your teeth and adjusts your bite.

Each method has its own benefits and advantages. Night-time guards, braces and Invisalign can be used alone or in combination to correct crooked teeth, a jaw relationship problem, and achieve a lovely, healthy smile.

Next time you look in the mirror, consider: Is your smile as beautiful and as healthy as it could be?

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