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ORTHODONTIC OPTIONS

Bracing for it

Once dreaded, retainers are becoming more accepted by teens and even adults, writes PETA RASDIEN

The Instagram generation is embracing braces as never before as a selfie-ready smile with straight, white teeth has become ever more important.

Teens no longer dread getting them and an increasing number of adults are happily forking out thousands of dollars to improve their imperfect teeth, according to orthodontists.

Braces are used to correct developmental problems of the teeth and jaws, most commonly crooked and crowded teeth, but also overbite and underbite and gaps where teeth drift into the wrong position.

Prolonged thumb sucking, beyond five or six years, can also cause problems.

In recent times braces have evolved from the metal train-tracks of old into a smaller, far more comfortable treatment with more aesthetically pleasing options available for people willing to pay a bit more. From clear or tooth-coloured braces to clear plastic aligners, to lingual braces which fit inside the mouth on the back of the teeth rather than the front, braces need not be an 18-month to two-year sentence to a metal-filled smile.

Howard Holmes, specialist orthodontist and Australian Society of Orthodontists spokesman, said times had changed and there was far less stigma associated with braces these days. While parents might have horror stories about their own experiences, their children actually looked forward to getting them. "Because they can see that their teeth don't look right it impacts on their confidence and their self-esteem and they know that all these other kids have had their teeth

straightened," Dr Holmes said.

In fact, adults are a fast-growing customer base, representing up to a third of new orthodontic patients.

Dr Holmes said orthodontic treatment could straighten teeth regardless of how old you were, as long as you had a healthy mouth without gum disease or decaying teeth.

"It is very much a growing thing because a lot of those people who are coming in perhaps weren't given the opportunity of treatment when they were younger, perhaps their parents didn't believe in it or couldn't afford it," he said. "In young adults treatment would be comparable to treating a teenager. In an older adult who may have other dental complications where they might have had a lot of dental work over the years or they have lost some teeth or if they need jaw surgery as well, those things will add time to the treatment and obviously they become more expensive treatments as well."

Dr Holmes said it was impossible to quote a cost for braces without seeing a patient in a chair and assessing their problems and discussing expectations. Prices can range anywhere from \$1000 to \$15,000.

Private health insurance could cover a small portion of the cost but it was important to confirm your entitlements before going ahead with treatment, because people often discovered rebates were lower than they expected. Dr Holmes said even with top table ancillary health insurance the rebate levels could sometimes be disappointing.

It was also important to look after the investment you had made in your teeth when the braces came off. To keep them that way people had to use some form of retainer, either a removable plate or a fixed wire attached on the inside of the teeth.

"It takes time for the bone and gum around the teeth to remodel and consolidate and during that time the retainers that you wear are really important," Dr Holmes said. Over a longer period, teeth would also naturally move, whether you had braces or not, so a retainer helped keep them in place.

It is recommended children with obvious dental developmental problems see an orthodontist before they turn 10.

"If they come to see us for the first time when they are 13 or 14 or so, we have missed an opportunity to prevent a lot of problems."



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Orthodontist Howard Holmes fitting braces to Olivia Slee, 16. Picture: Gerald Moscarda

Trainer types

Metal braces

Far from the old-style train tracks some might remember from past decades, modern-day metal braces are smaller and more comfortable. Metal brackets are attached to the teeth and are then connected with a thin wire, which is adjusted or changed at regular intervals to gradually straighten teeth and correct bite. Metal braces are considered a cheap and effective option. Costs can range from \$4500-\$8000.

Ceramic braces

While working in the same way as metal braces and producing the same results, ceramic braces are less obvious with clear or tooth-coloured brackets. Costs can range from \$5000-\$8500.

Lingual braces

These are custom-made and attached to the inside surface of your teeth, rather than the front, so appear invisible. While aesthetically more pleasing for the time you wear them, they can have a short-term impact on speech and eating, more than regular braces. Costs can range from \$7500 for a single arch to \$12,500 for full treatment.

Clear aligners

Mostly used for mild to moderate orthodontic treatments, clear plastic aligners are removable and almost invisible. Costs for one

of the most popular clear aligner brands, Invisalign, can start at \$4500 for minor treatments and between \$6000-\$9000 for other options.

All prices are a guide only and do not take into account individual needs or health fund rebates

*SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF ORTHODONTISTS,
DENTAL GUIDE AUSTRALIA*



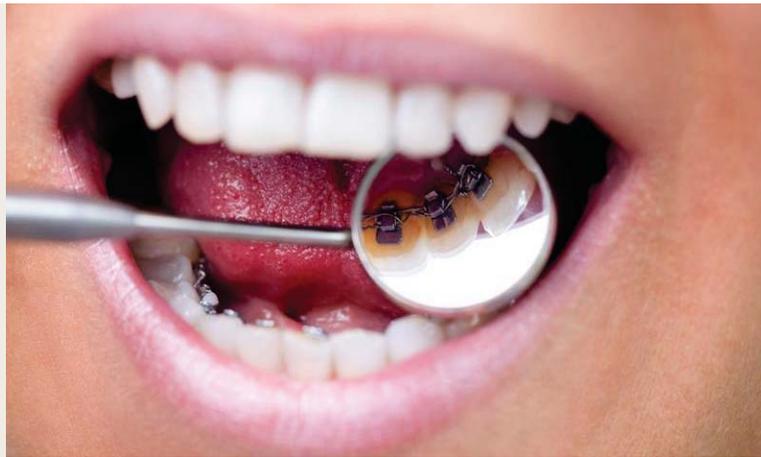
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Invisible lingual braces.



Clear aligners. Pictures: Getty



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Orthodontic options



Picture: Getty Images/iStockphoto

■ Metal braces remain the most cost-effective and time-effective treatment option. Depending on individual needs these can cost between \$5000-\$9000, a small portion of which may be refunded if you have health insurance which covers orthodontic treatment.

■ Braces are not just for teenagers — 25-30 per cent of new orthodontic patients are over 18.

■ Wearing braces is just the first stage of treatment. Patients must use either a fixed or a removable retainer long term if they do not want their newly straightened teeth to move or become crooked.

■ It is recommended children aged 7-10 see an orthodontist to identify if there are any issues which may require early correction. Waiting until all the adult teeth are through in adolescence for a first visit can mean early problems may have worsened and require more complicated treatments than may otherwise have been needed. A referral is not required to see an orthodontist.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF ORTHODONTICS