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INSTANT ORTHODONTICS

Despite Famous Metal Mouths Such as Tom Cruise, Experts Say That Adult Braces Are Not the Only Tooth Straightening Option

NEW YORK, N.Y., April 7, 2003 — It's a familiar sight: Megastar Tom Cruise steps out of a limo on his way into the premiere of his latest movie. As crowds surge around him, he pauses on the red carpet and flashes for the cameras his famous million-dollar... mouthful of braces. What first came as a huge surprise to the entertainment world, adult celebrities with braces have become increasingly acceptable – even en vogue – and many 20-, 30- and 40-somethings have headed to the orthodontist to straighten their crooked mugs with wires and brackets.

But are braces the only way for adults to correct their wayward teeth? According to Dr. Clifford Williams of the American Academy of Restorative Dentistry, veneers are actually a faster option for straightening adult teeth.

"Celebrities such as Cruise, Faye Dunaway and Chris Kirkpatrick from *NSYNC may be implying to their fans that brace faces are okay in Hollywood but the truth is many adult patients are opting out of orthodontics," says Dr. Williams, whose practice is largely made up of professionals and Wall Street executives. "There are two main reasons for this: One, from a health standpoint, adult teeth are much harder and more painful to move than a child's. Two, and probably more to the point, adults are very self conscience about wearing braces."

BRACES: A BUSINESS BLUNDER

It's not as if corporate executives are less tolerant, says Dr. Williams. It's just that impressions are too important to play with. "In a world where professionals are going so far as to get chin implants to strike a more imposing profile, it's not surprising that they would strive to avoid anything that might make them appear unseasoned, such as braces," he says. "With the economy fluctuating like a yoyo, they need every advantage they can get."

That's why veneers have become the solution of choice for many adult patients. "Rarely do I see a case where teeth are too crooked to address with cosmetic dentistry," says Dr. Williams. "Technology has gotten the veneer porcelain as thin as a half-millimeter, so dentists can give the impression of longer, straighter teeth without them appearing unnaturally thick."

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MORE THAN JUST STRAIGHTENING

In addition, Williams points out that while braces can straighten out a person's teeth, they cannot adjust a tooth's length or width. "From a vanity standpoint, the teeth we are born with are not always the ones that best compliment our faces," he says. "Often, adjusting the size or shape of the teeth or gumline, even minimally, can vastly improve in the visual presentation of the face."

"Secondly, a misaligned bite, which is the source of tooth breakage and millions of headaches, is most often caused by the length of the teeth and not by their position," says Dr. Williams. "While braces only straighten, a dentist can grind down or build up the biting surfaces of a tooth, giving the upper and lower teeth a more perfect fit."

"Unfortunately some orthodontists don't have a good understanding of the bite," he adds. "They may put the teeth in an ideal aesthetic position, but they don't address the correctness of the bite. And biting down on misaligned teeth will eventually cause them to shift again."

WEEKS VERSES MONTHS OR YEARS

For every 10 patients who express concern about their misaligned teeth, only 1 or 2 opt for braces, according to Dr. Williams. "After being referred to the orthodontist, they come back and say, 'I just don't see myself wearing braces for the next two years – what are my other options?'" says Dr. Williams. "It's not as if they are impatient; they just feel that if they can achieve the same or better results in a matter of weeks, why invest such a long time?"

FORGET ABOUT, “NO PAIN, NO GAIN”

Regardless of how orthodontic technology has advanced in recent years, it still comes down to the fact that you are moving teeth that don't want to be moved. This is especially true in adults because their bones are more rigid than teens' are and their teeth are anchored more firmly.

"Because a teen's bone is softer, the orthodontist can apply far less pressure on the tooth and still get it to move," says Dr. Williams. "Considerably more pressure is needed to shift adult teeth and thus, there is a considerably greater amount of pain." He adds that the rigidity of the bone also causes teeth to take significantly longer to arrive at their desired locations.

NO ONE IS THE WISER

Just like other cosmetic procedures, often the goal is to look great without those around you being able to put their finger on what you had done. "I get a lot of feedback from patients who say that their friends and colleagues comment on how great they look and inquire if they've had a face lift or even if they've lost weight," says Dr. Williams. "Veneers done well will not only look fantastic, but will also look natural."