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Adult Orthodontics

Many adults wish they had braces when they were children.

By Dr. Susan Maples

Q: I'm 40 years old and I have always hated my crowded teeth. I really can't afford upper and lower veneers and I don't really want my teeth ground on anyway. Are there any other solutions?

A: You are not alone. Many adults wish they'd had braces as a child and they try to hide their crowded (or spaced out) teeth when they smile.

It is true that veneers can create the illusion of perfectly straight teeth. And also true that we usually reduce enamel in our preparation. The more crowded the teeth, the more reduction is necessary to create a beautiful result.

Think about braces. Adult orthodontics is widely accepted in our contemporary culture. Granted, tooth movement takes longer than restoring teeth with porcelain veneers or composite bonding, but you 'll have your own whole, healthy teeth when you're finished, and at a fraction of the cost of veneers. Many orthodontists offer an initial consultation at a very affordable fee.

Most adults balk at the average two-year orthodontic treatment time. Now we can help many adults achieve a beautiful smile in 3-8 months, by focusing on front teeth while preserving the position and stability of the back teeth. Short term orthodontic treatment is less expensive than conventional orthodontics as well. I like the quote from Dr. Vince Kokich, former president of the American Association of Orthodontics, who stated that "Children should be treated *ideally*, and adults, *realistically*."

If teeth are chipped, worn or badly discolored we can combine minor tooth movement with cosmetic restoration (composite bonding or porcelain) . Teeth that are in the right position and alignment need far less enamel reduction (grinding) to place beautiful restorations.

Aside from treatment time, the other major obstacle I hear is appearance--no one wants a metal mouth. Worry not! Now we can use nearly invisible braces (clear brackets and tooth-colored wires) or sometimes clear, truly invisible aligners.

I find that most adults who experience dramatic smile improvements from short term (4-7 months) orthodontics are thrilled. They become more committed to the overall health and preservation of their teeth.

If crowding or unsightly gaps keeps you from smiling, by all means ask your dentist about what's possible for you!

