

# Adult Braces – A Good Fit?

BY PAMELA BRILL

Let's get something straight: Just because you didn't have braces as a kid doesn't mean you've missed your chance. According to the American Association of Orthodontists, one out of every five people wearing braces is an adult, and the average adult patient count is up 7% from 2016.

**THE UPSIDE OF OLDER ORTHO** The main reasons adults decide to get braces fall into one of two camps: cosmetic or functional. "If you don't like the way your teeth look, or you don't chew well, you may decide to seek treatment," says Dr. Wellington Rody, chair of the orthodontic and pediatric dentistry programs at Stony Brook School of Dental Medicine. And since adults make a conscious choice to wear braces, as opposed to younger patients whose parents invariably make that decision for them, they are more inclined to take better care of their dental hygiene. "Adults know what they want to get out of this," he says. "They are more self-motivated, follow instructions better and strive to get the best results possible."

**POTENTIAL CAVEATS** While age does not necessarily pose a restriction for orthodontics, the health of one's teeth is more of a concern. "Bone levels deteriorate around our teeth as we get older and bone structure gets weaker," Rody cautions. Having a full assessment to determine overall oral health in advance is essential for getting optimal treatment.

Adult ortho patients may also have to endure a slower treatment process. "In general, we need to be more careful when moving teeth in adults since breakage is possible," he adds.



**OPTIONS** Gone are the days of full-fledged metal mouths; modern advances in design include less conspicuous choices, including aligner therapy (nearly invisible braces) and lingual braces (positioned behind the teeth instead of on the front). During an initial consultation, orthodontists can discuss which option works best for a patient's unique situation. Regardless of braces style, patients can expect regular adjustments every four to seven weeks. A complete treatment lasts from one to three years, depending on the amount of movement required to achieve desired results.

**CARE AND MAINTENANCE** Similar to younger patients, adults will need to refrain from indulging in crunchy and sticky foods to minimize the potential for bracket breakage. (That means no caramels or gummy candies on Halloween.) And for coffee and red wine drinkers, taking extra care to brush will reduce staining. "It can be more challenging to reach those surfaces, so patients must stick to a more rigid cleaning protocol," Rody says.

And just because you are donning braces it doesn't rule out the need for regular cleanings and checkups. "Keeping track of the health of the bones around the teeth becomes even more necessary," Rody says.

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