

## Beauty and Beyond

In an affluent society like Singapore where basic needs are taken care of and the emphasis on physical appearance is evident, there has been a noticeable increase in cosmetic dental treatments over the last few years. This is because the correction of crooked or crowded teeth can help to significantly improve one's appearance by bringing teeth, lips and face into proportion, providing the symmetry to facial features that can ultimately **enhance one's outward appeal**.

A beautiful smile is, without question, a valuable asset. It has the ability to portray openness and confidence, encourage positivity and more importantly has the power to attract one to another. It is common knowledge that physical appearance can indeed affect one's self-esteem and studies have shown that those who make an effort to improve their looks generally have **higher level of confidence**. Through my years of practice I have also noticed that those who have straightened their teeth tend to smile a lot more frequently and consequentially appear more self-assured.

While an attractive smile and its psychological aspects are important, the benefits of having straight teeth are however not purely cosmetic, as they can have a great impact on your overall health and wellbeing.

The first is its ability to improve your oral health because straight teeth are simply easier to clean. The most basic method of maintaining good oral hygiene is to remove plaque and food residue by brushing daily. Just how effective a toothbrush is at ridding your mouth of bacteria depends on its ability to reach your mouth's every nook and cranny. Even for the most innovative of toothbrushes, with the most well designed bristles, reaching areas between crooked and crowded teeth can be a challenging task, increasing the risk of developing caries and bad breath.

### Bacteria!

The bacteria in our mouth feed on the sugars from our diet and produce acids that are corrosive to tooth enamel. As the

### How Straight Teeth Can Improve Your Wellbeing

acids etch away at the surface of the tooth, a cavity will develop over time, providing a haven for more bacteria to breed. This whole process creates a strong odour that is hard to conceal and will only disappear once the cavity is treated.

Individuals with straight teeth will also have a reduced risk of gum disease, also known as gingivitis. Gum disease is when plaque deposits infect gums causing it to become red, inflamed and bleed easily. If left untreated, it can destroy the support of the teeth, which can eventually become loose and may have to be removed. While gum disease is reversible with professional treatment, having teeth that are properly aligned reduces the tendency to trap food particles and retain less plaque.

Orthodontic treatment can also help improve the function of teeth, to enable us to bite, chew and speak effectively, which can often be marred by the presence of misaligned teeth. For example, people whose front teeth do not meet in what we call an open bite, will find it challenging to pronounce certain letters, words and syllables, sometimes resulting in a permanent lisp, preventing them from becoming effectual and convincing speakers.

When teeth are not properly aligned, there is an imbalance of impact when chewing and grinding food. The disproportion of stress on teeth can cause premature wear and tear over time, jeopardising the integrity of the tooth structure and supporting bone. It can also at times cause painful jaw and joint problems,

so proper alignment is important as it can bring comfort and better maintain the tooth structure by reducing the formation of abnormal wear patterns.

Most people are familiar with the more conventional teeth-straightening treatments such as metal, ceramic and lingual braces, which involve the use of wires and rubber bands to move teeth into position over time. The course of treatment also includes monthly visits to the orthodontist for adjustments and progress checks.



*An Invisalign user*

## The New Braces

For many adults, the prospect of wearing braces can be daunting, as people tend to associate it with the awkward teenage years. Even professionals who are well aware of the benefits of straight teeth hesitate to opt for treatment due

to concern that they will be taken less seriously at work with braces on. For those with frontline jobs such as in the service and film industries, for example, wearing braces at work is often unacceptable. People are also affected by the perception that braces will impact their attractiveness quotient and social appeal.

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The newest form of orthodontic treatment that I have found most useful, particularly in treating patients who are self-conscious about wearing braces, is Invisalign. Using a series of clear, removable aligners, teeth are moved into position step by step over time. Unlike conventional braces that can be detected even from a distance, these aligners are see-through clear, allowing professionals to undergo treatment without anyone noticing. Tailor-made using 3D technology, these aligners sit well on teeth without irritating gums and lips. While wearing the aligners will take some getting used to, the comfort level is certainly higher than having to deal with the discomfort of brackets and wires. The fact that they are removable for eating and cleaning during treatment makes it easier for patients to maintain a higher level of oral hygiene, without having to worry about the unsightliness of getting food trapped in their braces.

With a greater understanding of the aesthetic and health advantages of straight teeth, it is no wonder many are turning to orthodontia as the simple solution to improving their overall wellbeing and quality of life. **ehb**

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