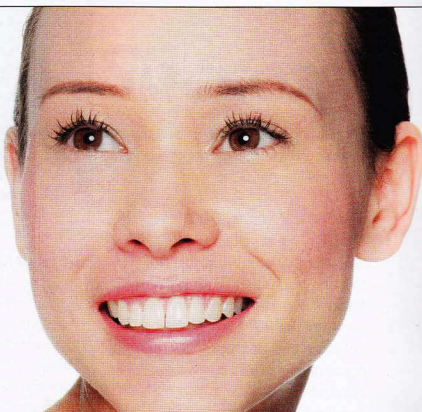


A crooked smile can be charming, but crooked teeth are just plain unattractive. Dental Surgeon DR CHENG ENG WAH explains how getting teeth aligned improves not just looks but overall health and comfort. If looking wired up puts you off, opt for clear aligners.



Straight TALKING

While a confident smile is important, the benefits of having straight teeth are not purely cosmetic, as they can have a great impact on your overall health and wellbeing. Having straight teeth can improve your oral health simply because they are easier to clean.

In a world where image very much defines who you are and how you are perceived, there is no wonder more and more people are seeking to improve their appearance with straighter teeth in their adult years.

The reason for this is that working adults are more aware of the advantages straight teeth can have on their social and professional lives and are also probably now in a financial position to be able to afford treatment, which may not have been an option in their growing years.

Orthodontia and the process of bringing teeth, lips and face into symmetry has, for many, been a life-changing step. Not only in transforming smiles and improving appearances, but also in raising levels of self-esteem, with many reporting a greater sense of poise and confidence in the way they interact with others, no longer self-conscious about their teeth.

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One of the key steps in maintaining good oral hygiene is the removal of plaque and food residue through regular brushing, which can be done more efficiently when teeth are well aligned as there are less hard-to-reach areas compared to crooked and crowded teeth.

Being able to clean effectively will also reduce the risk of gum disease, which occurs when bacteria in plaque infect the gums and cause it to become red, inflamed and bleed easily. While professional treatment can restore gum health, having properly-aligned teeth to begin with reduces the likelihood of bacteria and plaque build-up.

For some, straightening can considerably improve the function of their teeth. Our teeth are designed to help us bite, chew and speak effectively and this can be flawed by the misalignment, which can cause difficulty in pronunciation and result in intelligible speech.

The structure of teeth and supporting bone are also better maintained with proper alignment, as it reduces the formation of abnormal wear patterns that occur with misaligned teeth. Disproportion of stress takes place when there is an imbalance of impact in chewing and grinding food, causing premature wear and tear over time and, in some cases, facial pain and headaches.

The prospect of wearing braces, however, can also sometimes be daunting as people tend to associate it with the awkward teenage years. Some of the common concerns they face in contemplating treatment include the level of physical discomfort, necessary lifestyle changes, and the impact orthodontic appliances will have on their attractiveness quotient during treatment. Some of these issues can be addressed with adequate information to help clarify qualms about orthodontia.

Is it painful?

Straightening teeth involves the process of moving teeth step by step into the desired position over time using applied force. So there will naturally be some discomfort and tenderness when pressure is applied to guide teeth into place.



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Do I need to extract my teeth?

Contrary to common perception, extraction is not standard across all orthodontic patients. The need to create space for teeth to straighten out varies with every individual and the best treatment plan can be established in consultation with your dental practitioner.

Will I need to change my eating habits?

Diet restrictions are understandably a cause for concern, especially in Singapore where food is a large part of life. The only reason to avoid certain foods during treatment is to prevent damage to brackets and wires in the case of conventional braces. Food that require considerable amount of force to bite off or chew such as guava, corn on the cob, nuts and hard candies, can cause brackets to loosen and detach from teeth. Patients should also stay clear of sticky foods like toffee as they are hard to remove once caught between brackets.

To avoid this inconvenience, treatment with Invisalign is a good alternative. Unlike conventional braces that involve the attachment of brackets and wires to teeth, Invisalign moves teeth into position using a series of clear aligners that can be removed before meals, which is ideal for eating and cleaning, which meaning that patients can continue to enjoy their food during the treatment period.

Will braces affect my professional image at work?

This has consistently been one of the main concerns expressed by adult patients, especially those in the service industry, who are self-conscious about wearing braces. In such cases, Invisalign is probably a more discreet treatment option to consider as the aligners are made of clear plastic that are virtually invisible. Some of my patients have completed treatment without anyone else knowing!

How long is the whole process?

The length of treatment varies for each case depending on the severity of the misalignment, the selected appliance and patient's commitment. Treatment can take anything from six months to two years depending on individual needs and treatment method. Patients who are diligent in progress check ups and adhere to care instructions will also contribute to the success of the treatment.

With a clearer perspective on the issues surrounding orthodontia and its oral health advantages, straight teeth has become the simple solution to self-improvement for many working professionals.

Dr Cheng Eng Wah is an Invisalign Elite Platinum Practitioner, and Principal Partner and Founder of iDental Surgeons Pte Ltd