

# Braces at 50?

Once associated with teens, braces are now becoming increasingly popular with adults seeking orthodontic treatment at a later age

Eveline Gan

eveline@mediacorp.com.sg

WHEN her 20-year-old daughter decided to get braces last year, Madam Tay J M accompanied her to the clinic. By the end of the orthodontic appointment, Mdm Tay decided that like her daughter, she wanted to get her teeth fixed too. Never mind that she was 52 years old.

"I like beautiful teeth. A nice set of teeth will help to boost my self-confidence," said Mdm Tay, who works as a secretary. "My teeth jut out slightly and they've yellowed over the years. At first I thought of only whitening them but I thought why not just go the whole way? Hopefully, I will have many more good years to go."

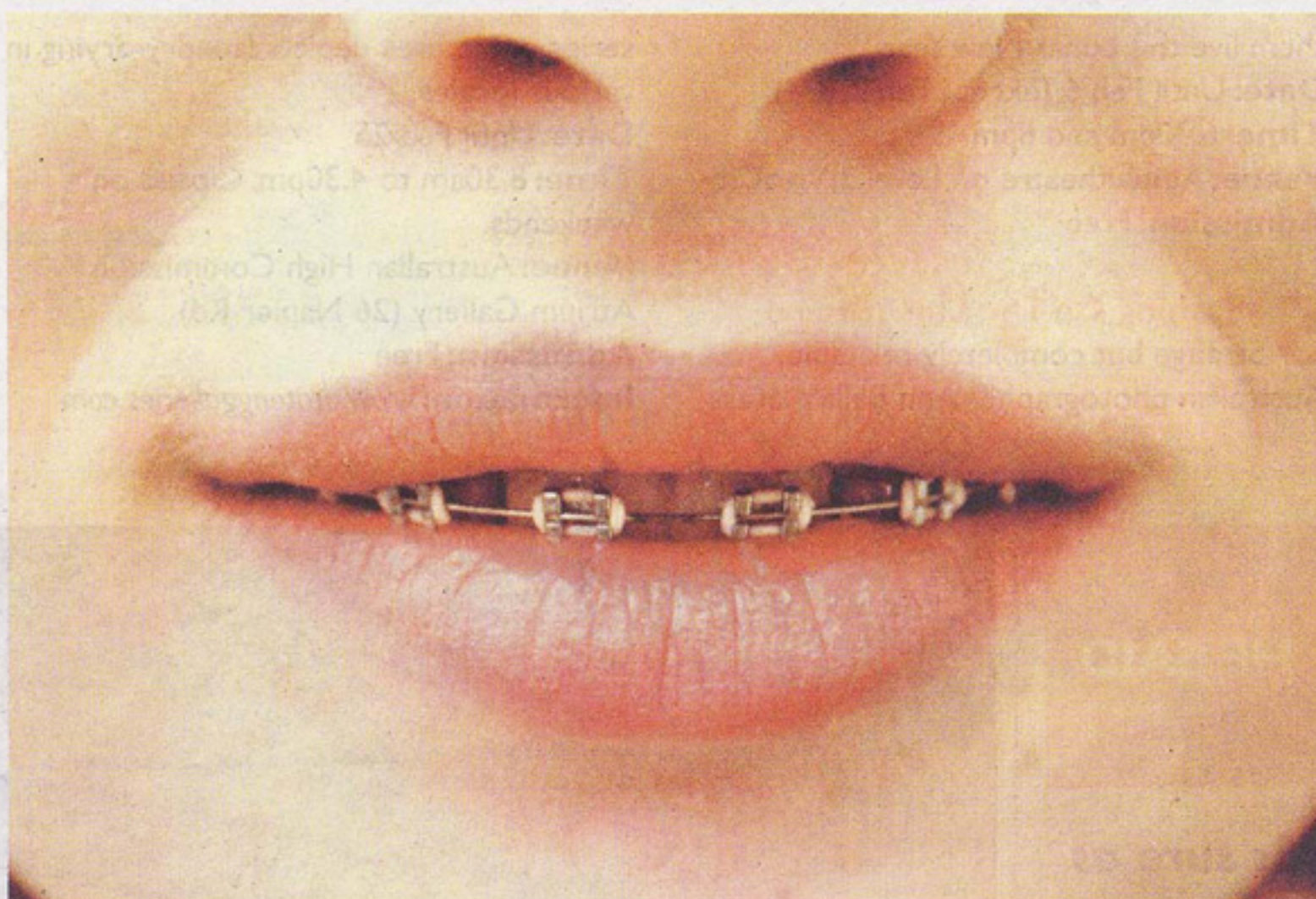
Mdm Tay now wears the Invisalign, a type of clear braces which are removable at mealtimes and during brushing.

At an age when some of her peers are already wearing dentures, Mdm Tay is rather self-conscious about her braces. This is why she opted for more "visually discreet" braces.

Orthodontic specialists, however, said patients like Mdm Tay are not a rarity. Once associated only with children and teens, braces are now becoming increasingly popular with adults seeking orthodontic treatment at a later age.

At I.Dental Surgeons, more than a third of those seeking orthodontic treatment are above the age of 30.

"It is not uncommon to see 40 to 50-year-olds straightening their teeth nowadays, compared to five years ago,



Thinking of getting braces? NUH's Assoc Prof Kelvin Foong tells you what to expect:

- For the first few days, you may experience some discomfort around the teeth. The intensity of discomfort peaks between 48 to 96 hours after the visit to the orthodontist. After this, the discomfort level drops.
- You may also experience an increase in salivary flow.
- If a plastic plate is worn as part of the orthodontic treatment in the upper jaw, you may have difficulty speaking and pronouncing words with "s" and "f" sounds in the first few days.
- By the end of a week, you'll not experience further discomfort. However, you may get ulcerations on the lips and cheeks during the first few weeks of placement of a new set of braces, especially if you are wearing the Lingual Braces, which are worn on the side of the teeth facing the tongue.

when most of our patients were in their teens and early 20s," said dental surgeon Dr Cheng Eng Wah, principal partner and founder of I.Dental, who estimated the increase to be about 15 to 20 per cent in the past five years.

At Dr Cheng's clinic, adults like Mdm Tay tend to opt for "more aesthetically pleasing braces" such as Invisalign or ceramic braces with transparent brackets, rather than regular metal braces.

Depending on the individual's condition, the treatment costs with regular metal braces start from \$2,800 onwards, while treatment with Invisalign start from \$6,500 onwards.

## INVESTING IN THE PERFECT SMILE

The trend is driven by people's "willingness to invest in aesthetics", as society becomes

more affluent, Dr Cheng said.

"I think people are more aware of how a nice smile can improve their appearance and the way they present themselves. Beautiful teeth are part of what builds confidence, especially when interacting socially or professionally," he added.

Aesthetics aside, having a full set of straight teeth has its health benefits.

"For instance, properly aligned teeth have a lower risk of decay compared to 'overcrowded' teeth, as brushing and cleaning are easier with straight teeth," explained Dr Cheng.

Associate Professor Kelvin Foong, a senior consultant at the National University Hospital's department of preventive dentistry, said with the ageing population keeping their teeth longer, more complex rebuilding of the dentition

could require braces to align the teeth before wearing prostheses such as crowns, implants and dentures.

At his clinic in NUH, Assoc Prof Foong's oldest patient was a 65-year-old who required minor tooth rearrangement using braces, before getting a new set of dentures.

While it is ideal to treat certain orthodontic conditions such as cross-bite and deviated jaw before the child reaches puberty, the experts said there isn't a "cut-off" age for getting braces. So you could be pushing 70 and still be able to get braces without harming your oral tissues.

Braces work by delivering light force to the crown of the tooth. The tooth moves to another position, when bone surrounding its root reorganises itself under pressure from the light force, explained Assoc Prof Foong.

"If a person's teeth are supported by healthy gums and bone, then it is possible to move teeth from one position to another within each jaw bone," he said.

## NOT FOR EVERYONE

There are certain adults who are unsuitable for braces treatment.

Assoc Prof Foong cautioned those above the age of 40 who have untreated moderate to advanced gum disease, as well as medical conditions such as uncontrolled diabetes and heavy smokers against getting braces.

Those who take medications that affect the flow of saliva, such as high blood pressure medication, also should not get braces. He explained that having braces in a dry mouth gives rise to the risk of tooth decay.

Six months into her orthodontic treatment, Mdm Tay has become used to wearing braces.

"The first month was the most difficult but I could bear the pain quite well. Right now, I almost forget they are there in my mouth," she said, laughing.

Mdm Tay feels her trouble, effort and money will be well worth it in the end, when her braces finally come off and she can partake in celebrations with a bigger and brighter smile.

# Braces at 50?

Once associated with teens, braces are now becoming increasingly popular with adults seeking orthodontic treatment at a later age

Eveline Gan  
eveline@mediacorp.com.sg

WHEN her 20-year-old daughter decided to get braces last year, Madam Tay J M accompanied her to the clinic. By the end of the orthodontic appointment, Mdm Tay decided that like her daughter, she wanted to get her teeth fixed too. Never mind that she was 52 years old.

"I like beautiful teeth. A nice set of teeth will help to boost my self-confidence," said Mdm Tay, who works as a secretary. "My teeth jut out slightly and they've yellowed over the years. At first I thought of only whitening them but I thought why not just go the whole way? Hopefully, I will have many more good years to go."

Mdm Tay now wears the Invisalign, a type of clear braces which are removable at mealtimes and during brushing.

At an age when some of her peers are already wearing dentures, Mdm Tay is rather self-conscious about her braces. This is why she opted for more "visually discreet" braces.

Orthodontic specialists, however, said patients like Mdm Tay are not a rarity. Once associated only with children and teens, braces are now becoming increasingly popular with adults seeking orthodontic treatment at a later age.

At I.Dental Surgeons, more than a third of those seeking orthodontic treatment are above the age of 30.

"It is not uncommon to see 40 to 50-year-olds straightening their teeth nowadays, compared to five years ago,



Thinking of getting braces? NUH's Assoc Prof Kelvin Foong tells you what to expect:

- For the first few days, you may experience some discomfort around the teeth. The intensity of discomfort peaks between 48 to 96 hours after the visit to the orthodontist. After this, the discomfort level drops.
- You may also experience an increase in salivary flow.
- If a plastic plate is worn as part of the orthodontic treatment in the upper jaw, you may have difficulty speaking and pronouncing words with "s" and "f" sounds in the first few days.
- By the end of a week, you'll not experience further discomfort. However, you may get ulcerations on the lips and cheeks during the first few weeks of placement of a new set of braces, especially if you are wearing the Lingual Braces, which are worn on the side of the teeth facing the tongue.

when most of our patients were in their teens and early 20s," said dental surgeon Dr Cheng Eng Wah, principal partner and founder of I.Dental, who estimated the increase to be about 15 to 20 per cent in the past five years.

At Dr Cheng's clinic, adults like Mdm Tay tend to opt for "more aesthetically pleasing braces" such as Invisalign or ceramic braces with transparent brackets, rather than regular metal braces.

Depending on the individual's condition, the treatment costs with regular metal braces start from \$2,800 onwards, while treatment with Invisalign start from \$6,500 onwards.

## INVESTING IN THE PERFECT SMILE

The trend is driven by people's "willingness to invest in aesthetics", as society becomes

more affluent, Dr Cheng said.

"I think people are more aware of how a nice smile can improve their appearance and the way they present themselves. Beautiful teeth are part of what builds confidence, especially when interacting socially or professionally," he added.

Aesthetics aside, having a full set of straight teeth has its health benefits.

"For instance, properly aligned teeth have a lower risk of decay compared to 'overcrowded' teeth, as brushing and cleaning are easier with straight teeth," explained Dr Cheng.

Associate Professor Kelvin Foong, a senior consultant at the National University Hospital's department of preventive dentistry, said with the ageing population keeping their teeth longer, more complex rebuilding of the dentition

could require braces to align the teeth before wearing prostheses such as crowns, implants and dentures.

At his clinic in NUH, Assoc Prof Foong's oldest patient was a 65-year-old who required minor tooth rearrangement using braces, before getting a new set of dentures.

While it is ideal to treat certain orthodontic conditions such as cross-bite and deviated jaw before the child reaches puberty, the experts said there isn't a "cut-off" age for getting braces. So you could be pushing 70 and still be able to get braces without harming your oral tissues.

Braces work by delivering light force to the crown of the tooth. The tooth moves to another position, when bone surrounding its root reorganises itself under pressure from the light force, explained Assoc Prof Foong.

"If a person's teeth are supported by healthy gums and bone, then it is possible to move teeth from one position to another within each jaw bone," he said.

## NOT FOR EVERYONE

There are certain adults who are unsuitable for braces treatment.

Assoc Prof Foong cautioned those above the age of 40 who have untreated moderate to advanced gum disease, as well as medical conditions such as uncontrolled diabetes and heavy smokers against getting braces.

Those who take medications that affect the flow of saliva, such as high blood pressure medication, also should not get braces. He explained that having braces in a dry mouth gives rise to the risk of tooth decay.

Six months into her orthodontic treatment, Mdm Tay has become used to wearing braces.

"The first month was the most difficult but I could bear the pain quite well. Right now, I almost forget they are there in my mouth," she said, laughing.

Mdm Tay feels her trouble, effort and money will be well worth it in the end, when her braces finally come off and she can partake in celebrations with a bigger and brighter smile.

## HEALTH BITE

# Teeth loss in elderly a possible sign of memory degeneration

ELDERLY people showing early signs of dementia are more likely to lose their teeth, and this, in turn, may even speed the decline in memory function, according to new research published in BioMed Central's open access journal *Behavioral And Brain Functions*.

Researchers at the Nara Medical University and hospitals in the Nara region of Japan examined the teeth of more than 4,000 volunteers aged 65 and older, who also underwent a psychiatric

assessment to determine the level of mild memory impairment.

It was discovered that those with fewer teeth, or even no teeth, were significantly more likely to have some form of memory loss, or even early stage Alzheimer's disease.

When asked about their use of healthcare services, participants with memory loss symptoms were found to visit the dentist rarely, which is one possible explanation for the study's findings.



However, Dr Nozomi Okamoto, the principal investigator, revealed that there may be other links to tooth loss and a decline in cognition.

"Infections in the gums that can lead to tooth loss may release inflammatory substances, which in turn will enhance the

brain inflammation that cause neuronal death and hasten memory loss", she said.

"The loss of sensory receptors around the teeth is linked to some of the dying neurons." This may even be a vicious cycle situation. If these brain connections are lost, the teeth will fall out and a fewer number of teeth contributing to cognitive decline.

Though the explanations for the research findings have been corroborated in animal models, further experimental evidence needs to be obtained to confirm this in humans.

Nevertheless, the findings offer a reminder as to why it is so important to brush your teeth and maintain good oral health.