

## *Just to Let You Know*

### **“Aren’t I too old?”**

Is the question often asked when we suggest orthodontic treatment for an adult?

“Probably not...” is usually our reply.

It is basically the same as orthodontic treatment for a teenager with a few minor differences.

Common reasons for us to suggest that an adult has orthodontic treatment are:

- To improve the appearance of the teeth and face. Relieve crowding or close spaces, upright tilted teeth or straighten rotated teeth.
- To move teeth prior to crown and bridgework to facilitate an improved result.
- To improve the ability to clean teeth and therefore improve gum health.
- To improve function – to make it easier to eat.

The types of braces available are:

1. Removeable braces- these have a plastic plate which supports small metal attachments which move the teeth. These tend only to tip teeth, not push or pull them through bone and are usually not suitable for adults.

2. There are the “Invisible” appliances such as Invisalign which involve a series of plastic covers which fit over and slowly move the teeth. They are not suitable for every problem.

3. Fixed braces are attached to the teeth. The small oblong brackets are cemented to the teeth and a wire threaded through the attachments on the brackets. The wires are adjusted every few weeks and it is the forces exerted on the teeth by the wires

which make them move. The brackets can be metal or ceramic. Ceramic is less obvious but more expensive.

4. Lingual orthodontics are fixed braces attached to the inside of the teeth. These are virtually invisible but more noticeable to the tongue. There are far fewer orthodontists doing this treatment, although the numbers are increasing. It is probably the most expensive option.

The main difference in treatment for an adult is that the treatment takes longer. As you get older, you heal more slowly. As a result, the orthodontist needs to make smaller adjustments during the treatment. Your teeth will still move, but more slowly.

The other difference is that it is harder to enlarge your mouth to get all of your teeth to fit. If when you are growing your mouth is too small for your teeth, the orthodontist can stretch your mouth so everything fits. Once you stop growing, your jawbone hardens; it is difficult for an orthodontist to stretch your jaw. Some people elect to have their jaw enlarged surgically. However, most adults decide to have their teeth straightened, but not get their jaw enlarged.

That changes the treatment somewhat because the orthodontist may have to remove some teeth to make everything fit. Nevertheless, orthodontic treatment still works. It just happens more slowly and may be slightly more painful when you are older.

We have a number of adult patients who have undertaken orthodontics and all are thrilled with the results. We have several orthodontists to whom we are very happy to refer our adult patients for advice and consultation. If you are interested please ask.