

The rise of the 'smile job'

THANKS TO
GROWN-UP BRACES,
STRAIGHT TEETH
ARE THE NUMBER-
ONE BEAUTY FIX-IT.
ROSIE GREEN
BOOKS AN
APPOINTMENT

Property prices, pelvic floors and the state of the Beckhams' marriage are standard girls'-night-out chat. But, recently, I've noticed a new topic of conversation creeping in. Braces. It's not news that whiter teeth make us look years younger, or that Hollywood newcomers are whisked straight from LAX to the dentist's chair for veneers. But grown-ups sporting a mouth full of metal? It's a fairly recent phenomenon and one that elicits an almost obsessional interest in most thirtysomething women I meet.

A newspaper tells me that Anna Friel, once proud of her British pegs, now has a close-up-worthy grin, courtesy of an orthodontic brace and bleaching. 'We are definitely seeing a rise in women who want braces,' says Dr Asif Chatoo, a Wimpole St orthodontist. Dr Tim Bradstock-Smith, from The London Smile Clinic, goes one step further, referring to 'an explosion' in patient enquiries. He credits new technology that

means braces can be much less obtrusive. 'Patients are also wanting something long-term,' adds Chatoo. 'With veneers, you have to have treatment again (they last roughly 10 years), and you have the destruction (teeth are shaved down and porcelain caps fitted over them).'

What Chatoo doesn't say, because he's too polite, is that there is a growing backlash against veneers. Fake teeth, like fake breasts and nails, are starting to feel a bit WAG-like. 'If your teeth are crowded, but otherwise okay, drilling them down seems crazy,' says Bradstock-Smith. My friend, Jilly, a recruiter, mother of two and proud train-track wearer, agrees. 'I didn't want to trade my teeth in for veneers,' she says. 'They're in good health, just a bit wonky. My orthodontist (Dr Angela Auluck) promised me a brilliant smile and, two months into treatment, I can see it happening.'

So far, so convinced. But what are the downsides?

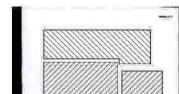
Well, time, for one. Most braces take at least a year to work. And then there's the question of looking like a geeky schoolgirl (think *Ugly Betty*).

But braces, like mobile phones and hair straighteners, have come a long way. Above and beyond the standard metal train tracks, you can now have less obvious white ceramic versions. You can also have transparent mouth guards, which sit almost invisibly over your teeth (aligners or Invisalign), or you can opt for braces on the inside of your teeth (Lingual), as I did.

So, what propelled me into the charming Dr Chatoo's chair and possessed me to spend the cost of a secondhand car on my not-so-hideous teeth? It all started on a beach in Dubai with my best friend. I had been up for a TV presenting job and failed to get it. Her verdict took me aback. 'I reckon it was your teeth,' she pronounced, between sips of rosé. I'm pretty sure it wasn't (more likely the fact that I talk 100 miles an hour and couldn't hide my embarrassment at having to 'test' a new lipstick by kissing builders in the street), but it made me think. My teeth were looking pretty crooked and they were only going to get worse.

Another conversation, this time with a fashion-industry friend, sealed my dental dissatisfaction. Knowing I was writing a piece on braces, she told me about a high-powered woman she once employed, who had really gnarly teeth. She just couldn't understand why the woman didn't fix something so detrimental to her appearance. That did it. I had the justification I needed. If I did not spend this money, my career would be over!

Fast forward a few weeks and I'm having my consultation with Dr Chatoo. My big fear is that my teeth will revert to form, once the braces are off. He tells me that, once I'm done with the braces, I'll have to wear a wire retainer –



forever. The alternative? Ninety-five per cent of orthodontics will relapse, if a retainer is not worn, warns Chatoo.

Having the brace fitted is uncomfortable, but nowhere near as bad as having a filling or root canal. Afterwards, the braces rub against my tongue, causing a few ulcers, but I escape the headaches that some people suffer when the wires are tightened (which happens every six weeks or so, to pull your teeth into line).

What I do notice is that I'm lipping slightly and eating isn't much fun. I'm on liquids-only for the first few days, then soft food (soggy Weetabix will be your friend). And going out for dinner is not so romantic (think the whole spinach-in-your-teeth thing times 20).

There is one unexpected plus. Weight loss. My few post-baby pounds? Gone. A week or so in, and I'm back eating almost normally, although crunchy apples are out of the question for the whole treatment.

So, what about results? A few months on, my bottom teeth are evening out and the one twisted tooth on my upper set is already in perfect position.

My friend, C, is my inspiration. She had white train tracks on the outside of her teeth and had them removed six months ago. She couldn't be happier with the transformation. 'It's taken years off me and makes me so much more likely to smile,' she raves.

I can live without apples for as long as it takes – my Julia Roberts smile awaits me. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- The British Orthodontic Society will help you find your nearest orthodontist; bos.org.uk.
- The British Lingual Orthodontic Society will help you find your nearest Lingual orthodontist; blos.co.uk.
- [Dr Asif Chatoo](#) is at The London Lingual Orthodontic Clinic; londonlingualbraces.com.
- Dr Tim Bradstock-Smith is at The London Smile Clinic; londonsmile.co.uk.
- Dr Angela Auluck is at the Dental Rooms in Wimbledon, West London; dentalrooms.co.uk.

Need to know...

- [Dr Chatoo](#) recommends you make sure an orthodontist fits your braces (orthodontic training is an extra six years on top of the requisite dentist training). Or, at least, make sure there is an orthodontist at the practice to oversee the work.
- You will need to wear a retainer for life after your treatment. Either a wire, fixed at the back of your teeth, or a night-time removable version.
- Any dentist can practise as a cosmetic dentist – worrying, as they may not have had sufficient training in this field. The British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry holds a list of dentists who have proved themselves proficient.

The options...

TRADITIONAL FIXED

BRACES: These can be metal or white (ceramic), take an average of 12-18 months to work and cost between £2,000-£4,000.

LINGUAL BRACES: Fitted on the inside of the teeth, so they don't show, the braces also take around 12-18 months to work. At £4,000 plus, they cost more than traditional braces.

INVISALIGN OR ALIGNERS: Impressions are made of your teeth and then lots of different plastic moulds are made. The first is an almost exact fit of your teeth, the second slightly straighter, and the third straighter still. You are basically coercing your teeth into the mould shape. The last one is your teeth in the perfect arch. Best on teeth that aren't too crowded. Takes from six to 18 months and costs £3,000 plus.

INMAN ALIGNERS: Relatively new, these work best if only the front two teeth on the top and bottom are crooked. Also useful for moving teeth before you have veneers (which work best, if teeth are in line). Inman aligners take around 10 weeks to work. Costs around £2,000.



