

Embracing Change

MARCH 4, 2010

You're never too old for an orthodontic adventure

by Melody Wren



Strategically placing elastics over certain brackets on my teeth is tricky the mornings that the arthritis in my right hand is playing up. I am certain that the notion of arthritis and braces is a combination few orthodontists considered years ago, however the number of over 50's and seniors that are dealing with braces and joint pain simultaneously gives a whole new set of issues to the orthodontists who regularly deal with pre-pubescent teens watching cartoons in the examination chair. I always ask if the channel can be changed to Oprah, or the decorating channel. According to the North American Orthodontic Association, more than 4 million people are in the care of an Orthodontist. Of those 4 million bracing it, 25% are adults.

In the past two years, the number of adults with braces has increased by 7.5%. It is no surprise that 62% of the adult patients are females.

There are a variety of reasons adults choose to have braces: they finally have the financial resources, they are facing loss of teeth if they don't undergo treatment, and the most obvious – cosmetic reasons. Often health reasons are the first reason to go with braces with delightful cosmetic side effects.

If you are considering braces, make sure you do your homework, as every case is unique. When it was recommended by an orthodontist that I get a full set of braces at 51, I consulted with my periodontist, and my regular dentist. Once I faced facts that I would lose my two front teeth if I didn't undergo two gum grafts before braces, I decided to go ahead with all of it. Losing my teeth was not

something that I was ready to do, but didn't realize it until given options. Gum grafts were necessary to give the braces a solid foundation before starting.

One 46-year old woman got braces on at the same time as her youngest son, after putting her two other kids through the process. She had serious second thoughts, as she was facing 30 months with full braces, as opposed to the norm of 18-24 months. Her front teeth were not only prominent, but facing backwards, so she made the choice to go ahead, and is now very proud of her beautiful smile, which was a major life change. She proudly smiles in all their family photographs now – something she had never done before.

It does boggle the mind facing braces at the same time as empty nest syndrome, arthritis, menopause, downsizing house, and job loss. In terms of stress, this time of life can be off the Richter scale, but generally people over 50 are more accepting of the ups and downs.

Age doesn't seem to be a barrier to braces as patients in their sixties, seventies, and eighties are undergoing orthodontic treatment. The oldest patient on record is a lady in Florida and at 91 got a full set of braces. When I got my braces at 51, a friend asked "why bother at your age?" At 91, that is a valid question. However, as Pam Paladin of the North American Association of Orthodontists says, "You're never too old. If you have teeth, you can move them".

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* This article was originally published in the Impowerage Magazine
<http://impowerage.com/health-wellness/living-well/embracing-change>