



CASE STUDY

Transforming oral health enables young adult to have teeth straightened

Case history

In common with many young adults, trainee dental nurse Salma has been self-conscious about her crooked teeth since childhood. She has always wanted to have a brace fitted but could not find a dentist prepared to fit them. Increasing numbers of adults who may have missed out on opportunities to have braces fitted as children, are now keen to investigate ways of straightening their teeth, for aesthetic or health reasons. However, a strong and effective oral healthcare regime needs to be evident, before the dentist will commence this programme of treatment.

Patient's Perspective

How did your teeth make you feel?

I'm 19 now and I have always been embarrassed by my crooked teeth, which have made me self-conscious about smiling since my early teens.

What happened when you asked about having a brace fitted?

When I was 15 my dentist told me that my brushing technique wasn't good enough to have a brace fitted and it would be a waste of time. I really tried hard to improve, but I just couldn't get my teeth and gums in better condition. It was very frustrating.

Why are you able to have a brace fitted now?

My new dentist Dr Ben Atkins believed that with some help I would be able to improve my own oral health enough to justify having a brace. He made me an appointment with the Oral Healthcare Education team.

What happened at your appointment?

Disclosing gel showed me the areas of my mouth I kept missing with my brush. It also identified the build-up of plaque on my gums. The team used an electric toothbrush and demonstrated how to use it properly. I think a lot of us assume that because it's an electric brush, it automatically cleans your teeth properly! You have to be as skilled using an electric brush as you are with a manual one. We also discussed using interdental brushes, which I hadn't done before.

What difference have these changes made?

Within a few weeks I began to notice a real difference. I used disclosing tablets myself, to monitor improvements, particularly in the reduction of plaque. At my next appointment, Dr Atkins confirmed how much cleaner my teeth were looking and how much healthier my gums were. I am so excited because these changes have opened the door to my treatment and I can go ahead and have my teeth straightened now. Also, I know what really clean and healthy feels like now.



Technical knowledge

Salma had worked hard on her own to try and improve her oral healthcare, but in order to bring about the kind of dramatic improvement required, her dentist Dr Ben Atkins decided to make her an appointment with the Oral Healthcare Education team at his practice. This is part of normal procedure for this dental practice when remedial treatment is required, but where the dentist believes the patient can radically improve their own dental health first, given the right resources and support. Once oral health has improved, a treatment plan can be implemented, in line with the latest NHS Guidelines for better prevention leading to fewer invasive treatments.

Within weeks of her coaching, Salma began to notice a real difference.

She has now reached a level of oral health where Dr Atkins is happy for her to have a brace and he sent her to Dr Sam Wong for treatment. Salma is now keen to press ahead – although the treatment is going to be quite different from what she expected. She had always been concerned in the past about the thought of having teeth extracted in order to have a brace fitted and, as a trainee dental nurse, she thought it was a great shame to have perfectly healthy teeth removed for purely cosmetic reasons. It was not until a consultation with Dr Wong that Salma became aware that she would be able to have a brace fitted without having teeth removed as she had no idea of the many remedial options that would be available to her, once her oral health was optimised.



Tips on oral healthcare. What to look out for!

Regularly check your gums. They should be pink, with an even tone throughout the mouth. If the area above one of the teeth is red and swollen, an infection may be the cause. Keep your eyes open for bleeding gums, which, along with bad breath, can be a sign of early stage gum disease or gingivitis. It is caused by a build-up of plaque on the teeth. Plaque is a sticky substance that contains bacteria.

Some bacteria in plaque are harmless, but some are harmful for the health of your gums. If you don't remove plaque from your teeth by brushing them, it builds up and irritates your gums. This can lead to redness with bleeding, swelling and soreness.

Look out for signs of tooth decay such as a dull white band on the tooth surface closest to the gum line. This is the first sign and can often remain undetected. Also, a yellow, brown or black band on the tooth surface closest to the gum line will indicate that the decay is getting worse. Finally, teeth that look like brownish-black stumps means that you have advanced decay.

If you are suddenly aware of hot or cold food being painful, or it starts to hurt when you chew or bite; these can also be signs that a trip to the dentist is necessary.

Remember - The basics are easy.

- Brush your teeth twice a day with an adult toothpaste
- Make cleaning fun - pick a favourite tune that lasts two minutes as your cleaning song!
- Don't rinse with water after brushing, this will cause the fluoride to be rinsed away
- Keep your sugar intake low and look out for the hidden sugars in things like dried fruit and smoothies
- Try fresh fruit, cheese and milk; rather than dried fruit, fizzy drinks and sugar based foods
- Keep anything sweet to meal times, reducing the frequency of sugar intake makes a massive difference

There are also plenty of resources to help you.

Several recent models of electric toothbrushes combine with a Smartphone App, which acts as an aid to better teeth cleaning and oral healthcare.

But if these are too expensive, then Free Apps like **Brush DJ** are also designed to help young and old enjoy 'brush-time' and clean more effectively.

Another helpful App, which advises on the Sugar, Fat and Salt content of most groceries is **Food Smart**. It works by scanning the bar code on food packaging and quickly gives you a red / amber / green score to help you choose healthier options in the weekly shop.

Also, we have diet sheets on our website which you can use to track your food intake over three days. If you show it to your dentist, they can advise if there are particular items that are very bad for your teeth. For example, foods like dried fruit and smoothies are often promoted as being a healthy option, but they contain very high concentrations of sugars.