



Getting It Straight

by Dr. Kirk Christensen,
Woodstock's Orthodontic Specialist

Q: *I am 42 years old. I have been unhappy with my teeth since I was a teenager. What realistic results can I expect at my age? Should I feel self conscious about having braces at this age?*

A: Great questions! Of course, I have no idea how involved your treatment will be, but generally you should expect a significant positive change in your alignment and bite, and very possibly an ideal result. In the hands of a competent orthodontic specialist you can expect a fabulous smile.

- We adults still have the capacity for bone remodeling, so it is possible to move teeth around to better locations. My 18 years of experience has revealed that there is a wide range of response time for tooth movement in adults. I have seen early “20 somethings” who take forever to change their bite despite excellent cooperation, and women in their late 50's who's teeth align as if they were in their early teens. In general, if you are having teeth removed for crowding or for bite correction, plan on at least 24 to 30 months. If you are one of the fortunate “fast movers”, your treatment may finish in a shorter time.

- Be prepared for a bit more discomfort than if you had treatment at age 13. Adult's lives are filled with stressors that children and teens don't have to manage, so tooth discomfort and cheek irritation from brackets may be perceived as a greater annoyance. Don't let this put you off, however, as you will adapt and it will become easier as you get further along.

- Even though orthodontic “braces” are common for adults these days, there is still the stigma of having them as an adult. First, consider that they make you look younger, which may be a plus for some of us. However, if you want to be more subtle, ceramic braces are “clear” and are less striking to the casual observer than are stainless steel brackets. The ceramic brackets are usually used on the more visible upper teeth. They are a bit bulkier (their strength is from thickness), and I find them somewhat less accurate in control of movement than stainless steel. Overall, they are a great appliance and look wonderful. Woodstock Orthodontics uses Clarity brackets by Unitek 3M which remove safely without enamel damage. Ceramics cost a bit more, but can be worth it if you are very self conscious about the process.

Dr. Christensen's column appears weekly in the Northwest Herald. Questions to be answered and treatment inquiries may be directed to:

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