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Taking better care of adult pearly whites

By Marguerite Higgins
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

More U.S. adults are wearing braces and using other oral remedies to not only straighten their smiles but to avoid dentures later in life.

Dental practitioners credit wealthy baby boomers, reality television makeover shows and new dental technology for the surge in demand.

"It's not like they have to show a metal-face smile anymore," Washington orthodontist Dr. Nahid Maleki said of her adult patients.

An estimated 1 million adults in the U.S. and Canada get braces and other treatments from orthodontists, according to the American Association of

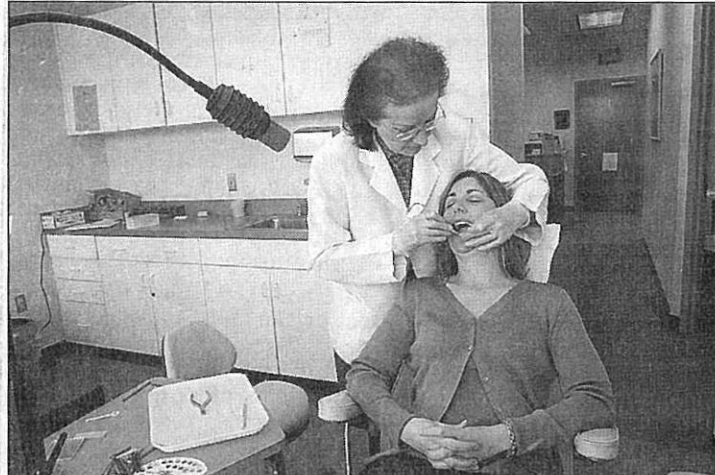


Daniel Rosenbaum/The Washington Times

Open wide: Dr. Nahid Maleki changed the rubber bands on Jennifer Frey's braces.

Orthodontists, a St. Louis trade group.

The number of American
see TEETH, page A22



Daniel Rosenbaum/The Washington Times

Jennifer Frey, a patient of Dr. Nahid Maleki's, started wearing porcelain braces to correct an "overpet." She decided to take care of the problem because she didn't want it to get worse as she aged.

TEETH

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adults being treated rose 14 percent from 1989 to 2000, according to the most recent data available from the trade group. About 70 percent of those patients were women.

Although children are still their main business, Washington-area dentists and orthodontists said adults are requesting more procedures beyond regular checkups.

Popular services include teeth whitening; veneers or custom-made shells that cover the front sides of teeth; bonding; crowns; treatment for periodontal disease; teeth implants; and braces.

Dr. Maleki, who practices in Northwest, said 25 percent to 30 percent of her clients are adults. She said the percentage has spiked in the past decade, as more adults become comfortable with trying newer braces that are less noticeable and painful.

In addition, adults with a severe overbite or underbite risk losing teeth and bone density in their jaw, she said.

Most of Dr. Maleki's patients older than 18 wear see-through porcelain braces or lingual braces, which are attached to the backs of teeth.

Alexandria patient Jennifer Frey, 33, started wearing porcelain braces almost two years ago to correct an "overpet," in which the lower teeth are too far behind the upper front teeth.

"Ironically, my dentist had told me that when I was younger

I had perfect teeth and didn't need braces," she said.

Ms. Frey, who expects to get her braces off this summer, said she paid \$7,950, slightly more than the normal range of \$6,000 to \$7,000 for standard braces.

"It was worth it because people hardly notice and the pain is gone. I didn't want this problem to get worse as I got older," she said.

Companies making teeth correctors for older patients are reporting a rise in business.

Align Technology Inc., a Santa Clara, Calif., manufacturer of clear teeth aligners, said profits for the first quarter ended March 31 more than tripled from strong sales of its product Invisalign.

Net income soared to \$1.86 million (3 cents per share) from \$557,000 (1 cent) a year earlier. Sales jumped 30 percent to \$51.1 million from \$39.2 million in the prior year.

Extreme cosmetic-makeover shows have compelled many of Dr. Arthur Novick's adult patients to seek teeth whitening and other services.

"They are coming out of the woodwork. They haven't gotten regular dental care in the past, but they want white teeth," said the Reston dentist, who has been practicing in Northern Virginia since 1972.

Most of the adults who want teeth whitening generally return for regular care, he said.

Americans spent \$1.34 trillion on health care in 2002, \$70.3 billion of which was used for dental services, according to the most recent data from the American Dental Association.

BRACE FACE

More adults are getting braces or other orthodontic treatments.

■ An estimated 1 million adults in the U.S. and Canada receive treatment from an orthodontist.

■ The number of U.S. adult patients getting braces and other services from orthodontists has increased 14 percent from 1989 to 2000.

■ About 70 percent of adult patients for orthodontists are women.

■ From 50 to 75 percent of the U.S. population need some orthodontic treatment.

■ Most orthodontic treatment lasts from 12 to 36 months, with 24 months as the average.

■ Fifty-four percent of all new orthodontist patients have dental insurance that includes orthodontic benefits.

Source: American Association of Orthodontists

The Washington Times

That was up 16 percent from the \$60.7 billion consumers spent on dental services in 2000, the data from the Chicago trade group said. Total dental costs are expected to increase 60.2 percent by 2013.

Dr. Novick said that in the past few years, he switched from providing standard silver fillings to composite resin fillings because they matched better with patients' teeth.

The natural-colored fillings cost more, but a growing number of his adult patients asked for them in order to avoid having visible fillings, Dr. Novick said.

Additionally, senior citizens are getting teeth implants, which fuse to the jawbone, rather than crowns, conventional bridges or dentures to replace missing teeth.

Dental implants rose on average to 56.2 per dentist in 1999, a 49 percent increase from 37.7 implants in 1995, according to a 2002 ADA survey, the most recent information available.

"Patients love them" because implants feel and look more like real teeth than dentures do, Dr. Novick said.