Brace Yourself

Wearing orthodontia mid-life.

By Meagan Francis

Growing up, I never thought much about my teeth. When I was 10 or 11 years old, my teeth were fairly straight and our family dentist told my mom that I’d probably never need braces.

But as I reached my late teens and early adulthood, slowly my front teeth began to stick out farther and farther. At first, I barely noticed. However, when my wisdom teeth decided to make an appearance in my early 20s, my mouth got crowded fast. As the bottom front teeth got especially crooked, they started to almost overlap, and my top two front teeth started to stick out more and more. I went from hardly noticing the crooked teeth to being unhappy and self-conscious about my smile in about a year.

Still, I didn’t seriously consider getting orthodontic treatment. “They’re just teeth,” I thought. It was hard to imagine spending money on making myself look better when I had small children to take care of. Wouldn’t that be selfish?

As the years went by, though, I began to realize that my crooked teeth were more than just a cosmetic problem. I started to have a hard time flossing as my teeth were overcrowded to the point that I could barely squeeze the floss between them. At a checkup, my dentist told me I was developing the early signs of gingivitis and asked me if I’d ever considered getting braces.

Finally, I was convinced: Not only were my teeth going to get worse and worse if I didn’t do something to correct them, but having crooked teeth could actually impact my health, too. Because I’d like to keep my actual teeth as long as possible, I made an appointment with a local orthodontist for a consultation. He told me that I could probably get good results from braces in 12 to 18 months. He would work with me to put together a payment plan and he confirmed that braces have come a long way since I was a kid— no need for huge metal brackets anymore.

I decided to take the plunge and get braces. I’ve had them for a few months now, and I’ve had a chance to live through all of the obstacles I used to worry about. If you’re an adult with or considering braces, read on for helpful information regarding common worries.

Soreness and Pain

This part was nowhere near as bad as my friends, who’d predominantly had braces back in the 80s or earlier, kept telling me. I was uncomfortable for a few days, generally while eating. Pretty soon, however, the soreness went away. One day I had a tight feeling after the wires were swapped out. Mostly though I can barely tell I have anything on my teeth.

Problems Eating

True, I’ve learned to avoid certain foods while eating in public, and other foods have to be chewed a specific way to not get stuck and be digested properly (steak needs to be cut in small pieces and chewed with the back teeth). But with practice, and a travel toothbrush always in tow, I’ve gotten pretty good at avoiding problem foods, managing iffy foods and doing an emergency cleanup when something gets stuck in a wire.
Looking Immature

I admit it. I worried that I’d look like a teenager or just plain strange as a 30-something with braces. But since I’m wearing clear braces on top, a lot of people don’t even notice I’m wearing orthodontia unless they’re close to me.

It is a little weird being around my 13-year-old son and his friends as many of them have braces. One of the funniest examples of this was when I went to pick up my 7th-grade son from a study group one day and found him sitting with three cute preteen girls, who were all also wearing braces.

One of the girls, the prettiest and most confident-looking of the bunch, eyeballed me curiously. For a minute, I felt self-conscious. Then I told myself: “Mamma, you are not 13 anymore. You’ve come way too far to care what a 7th grader thinks of you.” Later, the girl told my son that my braces made me look really young and cute. Bonus!

If a few people mistake me for my son’s older sister, I guess I can’t complain too much. He’s also going to need braces, and there’s a good chance he’ll get his on before I get mine off. Yet, this could make for a fun family photo. All in all, getting braces has been a positive experience. I’ve realized that wanting to have a pretty, healthy smile isn’t a selfish desire. Moms are people, too. And though I barely notice my braces these days, I can’t wait for that day, not long from now, when I get them off and can flash my new, straight and healthy smile.

Meagan Francis is a mother of five and a parenting author. She writes about being a happier mom on her blog, www.thehappiestmom.com, and also works with Damon System Braces, writing about her experiences as an adult with braces at www.bestsmilenow.com.