

Straighten up

More adults than ever before are correcting their teeth – even later in life

By Laurie Kaiser

Like many of us, Madonna Lakso flashed a silvery smile as a teenager. After enduring three years of braces, she emerged with two rows of straight teeth before her senior year in high school. But in recent years, Lakso – now 53 – noticed that her teeth had shifted.

“Two teeth in the very front were crowding each other and pushing one of the teeth backward,” said Lakso, a hospital trauma nurse who lives in Hamburg. “It was making me self-conscious.”

When her 14-year-old daughter started seeing an orthodontist, Lakso decided to look into treatment for herself. Last year, she was fitted with Invisalign, clear plastic removable aligners custom-made to slip over teeth. She wore them for just four months.

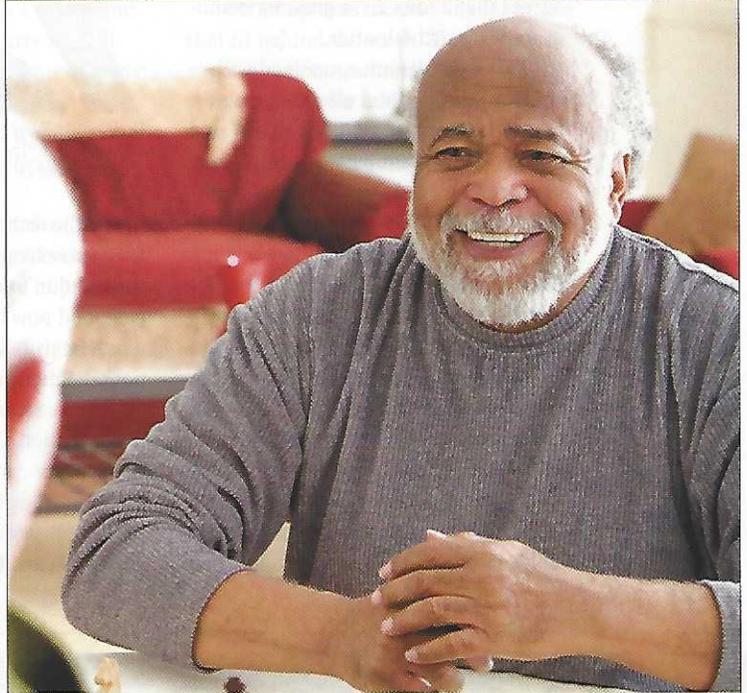
The result?

“It has definitely made a difference in my confidence,” said Lakso.

While braces have traditionally been associated with acne and first dates, a growing number of adults are opting for orthodontic work. According to the American Association of Orthodontists, the number of Americans age 18 and older getting teeth-straightening treatment jumped 58 percent between 1994 and 2010.

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Now, more than 680,000 adults seek orthodontic treatment annually.

Lasko was treated by Jason Jones, owner of Suburban Orthodontics. He agrees that adults are a growing demographic for orthodontics.

"More adults are concerned with their appearance and also are recognizing the importance of oral health," said Jones, whose adult patients range from 21 to 70 years old. "A lot want to have straight teeth to have more confidence."

Brian Preston, chair of the Department of Orthodontics at the University at Buffalo Dental School, estimates that 30 percent of UB's Dental Clinic orthodontic patients are adults. He travels frequently and sees the same trend in other countries.

"People are working longer and want to look their best. What happens frequently is that parents take their children in for treatment and then start



Dr. Douglas Wright of Owl Orthodontics said 65 percent of his practice's adult patients choose Invisalign, pictured here. "The ease of the removable, invisible aligners make it a popular choice among adult patients," said Dr. Wright.

to ask the orthodontist about treatment for themselves," Preston said. "Maybe they couldn't pay for treatment in the past, and now they can."

That usually means paying out of pocket, since many insurance plans don't cover adult orthodontics or only pay a portion. Invisalign and other clear aligners are comparable in cost to traditional braces. Prices in Buffalo typically range between \$3,000 and \$6,000; prices can run lower or higher depend-

ing upon the amount of work done.

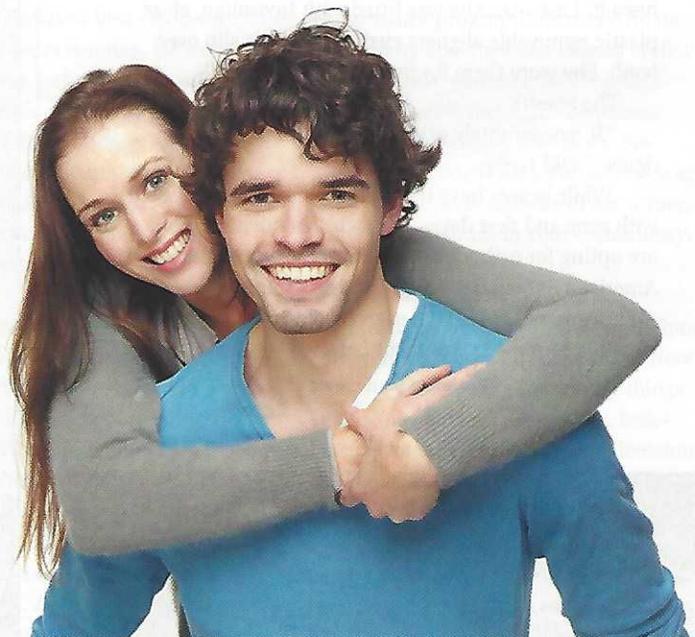
Still, many adults, like Lasko, view teeth-straightening as an investment.

Studies show that people get better jobs and higher paying jobs when they look more aesthetically pleasing, noted Peter DeRose, who has practiced orthodontics in Buffalo for more than 25 years.

"People do whatever they can to look better," he said. "Look at the Botox industry — it's the most performed

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nonsurgical cosmetic fix out there.”

Meanwhile, friends and co-workers are none the wiser. With Invisalign or another clear alternative such as Clear Correct, the aligners are virtually impossible to detect, DeRose said.

And the time commitment is short, usually about a year. Afterward, patients usually wear a retainer for six months or so to hold everything in place, he said.

While appearance motivates some patients to seek orthodontic care, Jones said more than half of his adult patients seek treatment because they can't properly care for their teeth due to crooked alignment or overcrowding. Straight teeth are easier to clean.

Larry, a 62-year-old Buffalo firefighter who didn't want to give his last name, is one such patient. He has some missing teeth, and

others were rotating or crooked.

“I thought they'll pull more teeth in a couple of years unless I took some preventative measure,” Larry said. “I basically didn't want to end up with my teeth in a jar by the bed.”

Jones fitted him with traditional braces, and he's about halfway through two years of treatment.

“I don't feel any discomfort,” he said. “Already, my chewing has changed.”

Traditional braces have improved, too, Preston noted.

“They aren't as bulky as they used to be and easier to tolerate,” said Preston.

While the clear aligners make a good choice for many adults, not all patients qualify for them.

“If you want to remove teeth or move the jaw, you're going to need more sophisticated treatment,”

Preston said. “Invisalign has its place, but it doesn't work for everyone.”

Other options include lingual braces that fit behind the teeth. They are more expensive than traditional braces and aren't suitable for adults and teenagers who have excessive bite problems.

Clear ceramic braces, like those offered at Owl Orthodontics, are another option that are less visible than traditional metal braces.

For his part, Jones said he enjoys his adult patients. They tend to be more compliant than their younger counterparts. After all, they are paying for the procedure and know what they want.

“They are really engaged,” Jones said. “Their parents aren't taking them to the office. They're getting there themselves.” ■

Laurie Kaiser is a frequent contributor to Buffalo Magazine.

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