

A Healthy Makeover Can Begin With Your Smile

(NAPSA)—One of the most popular and affordable extreme makeovers out there doesn't involve a plastic surgeon or a stylist. It involves an orthodontist.

Orthodontic treatment has long since been a way for people of all ages to look and feel better, and improve their dental health. In fact, the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) says five million people—children and adults—are in orthodontic treatment today.

So why the surge in popularity? One reason may be that a healthy smile can be linked to confidence, self esteem and even happiness. A second reason may have to do with new types of orthodontic technology. For instance, today's metal braces are smaller than ever. Some braces are tooth-colored, or even worn on the back side of teeth for total invisibility. On the flip side, some patients opt for gold-colored braces—the ultimate in mouth jewelry. Also, new "virtual face" software lets orthodontists actually show patients how they'll look when treatment is completed.

However, the benefits of orthodontics extend beyond looking and feeling good. That piece of advice is significant, because when left untreated, common orthodontic problems that people tend to cover up can lead to bigger problems down the road. Those "bigger" problems can include costly restorations such as root canals, crowns and gum surgery.

For example, crowded teeth (a condition that can be relieved by orthodontics) are not only unattractive, but they can be difficult to clean, which in turn could lead to tooth decay and gum disease. Properly aligned teeth are much easier to clean, so they are less



Orthodontic treatment is a healthy way to improve physical appearance—starting with a beautiful smile.

prone to dental disease.

Other orthodontic problems, such as cross bites or open bites, can lead to headaches and difficulty chewing and biting.

Many potential orthodontic problems cannot be seen by simply looking in the mirror—and the earlier such problems are caught, the better. That's why the AAO recommends children be evaluated by an orthodontic specialist no later than age 7.

"A beautiful smile in a healthy mouth is the most obvious goal of orthodontic treatment, but there's so much more to our specialty than meets the eye," says Dr. Terry R. Pracht, president of the AAO.

People interested in learning about a makeover through orthodontic treatment can ask their family dentist for a referral to an orthodontist. To find an orthodontist in the area, visit the "Orthodontist Locator" service at www.braces.org or call 1-800-STRAIGHT. Callers will also receive a free video.