

## 'It was the longest six weeks of my life but now I've got the perfect smile': Pioneering device which can straighten teeth in a fraction of the time traditional braces take

By [Alice Smellie](#)

Last updated at 9:58 PM on 31st December 2011



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Alice Smellie has had her teeth straightened

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Fashion magazines claim actor Tom Cruise and television shows such as *Ugly Betty* have made it acceptable for grown-ups to wear dental braces. Meanwhile, surveys say a Hollywood smile puts you on the highway to a job promotion and a better love life, while health experts reckon that having straight teeth is the only way to ensure they will be kept in working condition late into life.

It's certainly a look many of us desire – a recent study by the British Orthodontic Society revealed 45 per cent of adults are unhappy with their teeth and 20 per cent would consider having some form of treatment.

But actually sporting a set of train tracks on your teeth is as socially awkward as it has ever been. I should know, having worn braces for two years during my teens to straighten my goofy front teeth. It was awful and I was bullied relentlessly.

It was thrilling to finally have straight teeth, but in the Eighties people weren't automatically given a retainer to make sure teeth didn't move back into their misaligned position. Sure enough, by my late 20s, my teeth had started to cave in again. In my wedding photos, my smile is marred by the two vast tombstones swallowing up half of my lower lip. By my mid-30s, I looked like Nanny McPhee.

It was partly to do with ageing, as dentist Dr Anoop Maini explains. 'As we age, the lower jaw shrinks, pushing the teeth closer in together and crowding them. The facial muscles change in tone and start to droop – in turn changing muscle pressure on teeth – which forces them to become crooked. With a misaligned bite, teeth will grind and chip away at each other, crack and decay.

'People are concerned by the price of orthodontics but really it's a drop in the ocean compared with what gets spent firefighting dental problems later on.'

When, five years ago, I investigated having another brace, I was informed that it could take about two years to work and cost more than £3,000. Another option was veneers – where your own teeth are filed down and porcelain or ceramic facings are fixed to them.

This would be even more expensive – in the region of £10,000 – and they only last about ten years. 'This means huge costs doing repeated work,' says Dr Maini.

**The speed with which it achieves this objective is partly due to the fact it is fixed to so few teeth and partly because the front teeth have smaller roots and are thus easier to move**

Faced with these astronomical costs, I chose the grin-and-bear-it approach – and did nothing. But earlier this year I heard about Social 6, a sort of hidden turbo-brace, so named because it straightens only the six top teeth – four incisors and two molars – at the front of the mouth in as little as six weeks. Tiny metal brackets are fixed behind the teeth, using temporary glue, making them invisible, and a U-shaped length of nickel titanium wire slots in and is fixed tight. At this point the wire is stretched into an uneven shape behind the teeth. But the resulting tension rapidly returns it to its original U-shaped curve, taking the teeth with it.

The speed with which it achieves this objective is partly due to the fact it is fixed to so few teeth and partly because the front teeth have smaller roots and are thus easier to move. It is rumoured that Emma Watson and Kate Middleton have opted for this type of invisible brace, which costs about £2,000.

Social 6 was pioneered by Italian orthodontist Giuseppe Scuzzo. Dr Maini heard about it last year and was one of the first dentists in the UK to adopt it.

'Increasing numbers of patients come to me in their late 30s with crooked teeth seeking to improve their smiles but they do not want the cost or have the desire to file their teeth for veneers,' says Dr Maini.

'Social 6 is the perfect solution as it straightens teeth in an invisible way quickly and is more affordable.'



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**Straight up: Alice's wonky top incisor teeth, left, have been aligned, right, by Social 6**

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Social 6 may take up to three months – nothing compared with the amount of time I was previously contemplating – and I decide to go for it. I am sent a form telling me I can take pain relief should the brace cause discomfort but I consider this a small price to pay.

It is necessary to take an impression of my teeth to make the brace. A tray containing viscous liquid is pushed into my mouth. A week later, the brace is ready. It takes around 45 minutes to apply to my teeth. Each bracket is fixed on individually and the metal wire is threaded through.

When Dr Maini has finished, there is no evidence of a brace.

Two bite guards in the form of round blobs of glue are stuck to my back teeth. This ensures that I don't catch my teeth in the brace.





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**The Duchess of Cambridge is rumoured to have had similar dental treatments**

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It is now more apparent that the edges of the front ones have worn away after years of being misaligned, which wasn't evident when they were wonky.

A polishing strip-like metal floss is placed between my teeth to ensure there are slight gaps between them. 'Very crooked teeth press against each other,' Dr Maini points out. 'They are stronger than the wire, so we need to give them room to move.'

After six weeks, my teeth look perfectly straight but Dr Maini suggests we leave the braces on for a further

fortnight to ensure they've moved as much as possible.



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**Ugly Betty star America Ferrera has made it acceptable for people to wear traditional braces**

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The braces are removed and I am told I either have to wear a temporary retainer like the one I failed to wear as a teenager, or have a permanent retainer – a small wire – attached to the back of the teeth to hold them in place.

Without a retainer, and until they settle down, the teeth would return to their natural state within 48 hours. I opt for the permanent retainer, and a small amount of bonding (the material used in fillings) is glued to the bottom of my teeth to make them look even.

The end result is fantastic and I am thrilled. As I run my tongue gleefully over my teeth, I am handed a mirror and I smile with confidence for the first time in years.

From £2,150. [www.gentledentists.co.uk](http://www.gentledentists.co.uk)

This article has been edited by Aqua Dental Spa for conciseness.