

The reality behind the perfect smile

WHO WOULD think of (admittedly ageing) movie star Tom Cruise in the same context as braces.

Yet the truth is that this Hollywood mega star is probably the most famous recent example of those turning to braces – in his case, to fix a major shift in his centre line.

Usually the domain of awkward teenagers, braces are no longer restricted to those in early adolescence.

For many children growing up, their parents couldn't afford costly orthodontic treatment.

And even if they could have, teeth might well have moved during adulthood.

In reality, no matter how old we get, says the SA Society of Orthodontists, it is never too late to have that perfect smile.

For famous actors and actresses, in a beauty and image-obsessed world, their smile can never be flawless enough. The more popular they become, the more important their grin.

Close-up shots of their faces appear on everything from giant billboards and television, to magazines and other media.

And to ensure the close-ups need as little retouching as possible, many celebrities are opting for adult orthodontic treatment.

Take Tom Cruise. As his career peaked he endured ceramic brace treatment.



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But that didn't mean he stopped making movies or hid himself away in one of his splendid homes.

He was only too happy to parade his braces in public.

Everywhere he went, he flashed that famous brilliant smile.

So did he start a trend – not just for the rich and famous, but for ordinary people too?

In the US, about a quarter of all orthodontic patients are adults.

Here in South Africa, there are practices which say at least 30 per cent of their patients are adults.

So what are they having done?

Popular treatments, the society says, include ceramic brackets (tooth-coloured aesthetic attachments and appliances) behind the teeth, along with small metal brackets that are less conspicuous and



GRIN AND BRACE IT: Prince Harry, singer Miley Cyrus and actor Tom Cruise show off their orthodontics-enhanced gnashers.

much easier to keep clean.

Miley Cyrus, the celebrity daughter of country-music legend Billy Ray Cyrus and who became famous as Hannah Montana, made her smile perfect with orthodontic treatment.

Prince Harry, Princess Diana's youngest son, but better known as Chelsey Davies's ex, has an orthodontics-enhanced smile.

Film star Whoopi Goldberg did it, along with singer Gwen Stefani, model Cindy Crawford, actresses Cameron Diaz and Ashley Judd and even tennis star Monica Seles.

And word is that a Kempton Park orthodontist did a little something for Charlize Theron while she was still at school.

Specialists in other fields within the dental profession can comple-

ment the perfect smile through minor surgical treatment of the gums, enhancing health and appearance, and ultimately improving gummy smiles.

Crowns or thin porcelain caps (called veneers) are glued on to teeth that have been damaged to preserve the underlying tooth, but also enhance appearance.

Veneers represent a more conservative method of creating an even smile than crowns. They require less preparation to fit.

Dental specialists work together as a team to achieve the best possible clinical results.

In extreme cases, where major changes are required, a maxillofacial surgeon is included in the team.

Fixing the teeth is not just a mat-

ter of beauty. There are health considerations too.

Crooked, crowded and overlapping teeth not only damage self-confidence, they can also cause health problems such as:

- Tooth decay and gum disease: misaligned teeth are hard to clean, especially if they overlap. A build-up of plaque can cause tooth decay and gum disease.

- Injury to the gum: instead of meeting with its partner in the opposing jaw, a misaligned tooth may sink into a nearby gum, causing repeated injury.

- Wear and tear: the teeth of the upper and lower jaw are designed to fit neatly together. If they don't, the action of chewing may grind the teeth unevenly.

- Jaw injury: the jaw joint, called the temporo-mandibular joint, could suffer stress and strain from a bad bite, causing localised pain, headaches and sometimes clicking or grinding noises when the jaw opens and closes.

- Speech impediments: many sounds are made with the tongue against or near the teeth. Misaligned teeth or jaws can interfere with speech.

The medical advice is to make sure that your children get checked early as possible.

And if you're looking for a good specialist, visit the Society of Orthodontists' website at www.saso.co.za