

CAN'T WITHOUT YOU

From special translucent braces to quick-fix aesthetic treatments, there are now more ways to cosmetically enhance your smile



KAREN TEE

By today's standards of beauty, a straight and healthy set of teeth is non-negotiable. Fortunately, with the many innovations in the orthodontics trade today, almost anyone with the means can lay claim to an impressive mouthful of pearly whites.

Even if braces are called for, one no longer has to suffer a mouthful of angry-looking metal. The latest orthodontic braces are made of a fusion of transparent glass fibres and plastic material.

They are hard to see, even though they are worn on the outside of the teeth like traditional metal braces.

These transparent braces, such as SimpliClear by Singapore company Biomers, are used even by working models.

Ms Kyla Tan, 22, has worked on runway shows without anybody noticing them. "Unless they have been looking at me for a long time, most people I converse with do not even notice that I am wearing braces," says Ms Tan, a beauty queen and part-time model.

The innovations have contributed to a steady increase in adults seeking cosmetic dental treatments.

Dr Arthur Lim, the president of the

Association of Orthodontists Singapore, estimates the number has doubled over the past six years.

Some are even in their 50s, says Dr Lynette Ng, the dental director and prosthodontist for The Dental Studio, a subsidiary of the Singapore Medical Group.

Dr Ng says: "Patients see a beautiful smile with white and straight teeth as anti-ageing and, perhaps, even rejuvenating for their faces as the smile is the first thing a person notices."

But they must be prepared to put up with some discomfort for at least a year, she says.

Typically, a course of orthodontics lasts for about two years for teens and kids and half a year longer for adults.

This is because adult bones have hardened and need more time to be moved.

The same range of treatment is available for both adults and kids.

HEALTH BENEFITS BUT COSTLY

Getting one's teeth straightened does have health benefits, says Dr Vivien Tan, a senior consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Dental Clinic. Straight teeth leads to better speech. It improves one's chewing ability and hence digestion. Orthodontic patients are also more aware of the need for proper dental hygiene habits.

But to get these benefits, one must be prepared to pay.

Regular metal braces start from about \$3,500, whether at a government dental centre or a private dental clinic.

If you opt for "invisible" braces, SimpliClear starts from \$5,000.

Aside from transparent braces, there are also lingual ones, which are fixed to the backs of the teeth and invisible from the front. These can cost from \$8,000.

Then there are tooth veneers, thin shells bonded to the actual teeth to reshape and whiten them. They now come in stronger, crack-resistant materials such as zirconia and lucite. Veneers can be done in just one or two sessions.

For that, expect to pay around \$1,000 per tooth.

Teeth bleaching technology has also evolved to incorporate laser treatments, with less-harsh bleaching solutions being used.

These days, people want what Dr Chia terms "liquid paper white" teeth, to emulate the blinding white smiles of Hollywood celebrities.

In addition, "lunchtime" aesthetic procedures such as Botox and filler jabs can correct what dentists term a "gummy smile", which is a smile that reveals too much of one's gums.

The Botox injection relaxes a muscle behind the nose which elevates the lip when smiling.

Orthodontics also seems to draw patients of both sexes, says Dr Melvin Mark Chia, the chief dental surgeon of Tooth Angels & Co Dental Surgeons at The Central. Half of the clinic's adult orthodontic patients are men.

"Men tend to have fewer ways to improve their looks," he says.

For both men and women, a beautiful smile can do wonders.

Says Dr Tan: "The results enhance their self-esteem, self-confidence and self-image. They feel less self-conscious and are happier with themselves."

karentee@sph.com.sg

FOUR DIFFERENT WAYS TO BRIGHTEN YOUR SMILE

INVISIBLE BRACES

What's new: SimpliClear braces, launched last November, are made of transparent plastic.

They are the world's first completely transparent braces and can be used on most patients.

Earlier forms of "invisible" braces, which include Invisalign and lingual braces, had their limits.

Invisalign is a series of removable clear acrylic trays which are placed over the teeth to get them to gradually move, but these can be used only for minor repositioning.

Lingual braces are wire braces placed on the back of the teeth so that they cannot be seen.

However, patients often suffer from ulcers on their tongues due to the constant friction with the braces. Dentists also find it more difficult to manipulate the wires behind the teeth.

The manufacturing process for the SimpliClear polymer was developed by Singaporean mechanical engineer, Dr Renuga Gopal, for a post-graduate project at the National University of Singapore in 2001.

It was a joint project between the Dentistry and

the Mechanical Engineering departments.

Dr Gopal and two other partners formed a company called BioMers to market SimpliClear last year.

The polymer has properties similar to that of a metal wire – it is flexible enough to be bent and can exert a constant pressure on the tooth to cause it to move – which makes it suitable for orthodontics.

It is available in about 20 clinics in Singapore.

Pros:

- It is suitable for a broad range of patients – anyone who is suitable for metal braces can use SimpliClear.
- It can be worn by those who are allergic to metal.

Cons:

- The plastic wires are more brittle than metal ones, so they are more prone to snapping if you crunch on something hard such as ice.
- One set of SimpliClear braces costs about \$1,000 more than metal braces.

Cost: From \$5,000 to \$6,000, from Tooth Angels & Co Dental Surgeons, B1-01 The Central.

TEETH WHITENING

What's new: Teeth whitening is a common term used to describe teeth bleaching, in which a solution of hydrogen peroxide is applied to the teeth.

The bleach solution will dissolve and remove the stains on the tooth enamel (the outermost protective layer of the tooth).

Dental clinics offer laser or blue wavelength light treatments which activate the hydrogen peroxide for faster and more efficient whitening.

This technique has been around for more than 10 years, but there are new lamps which emit light without harmful ultraviolet rays or overheating the teeth.

There are also take-home tooth whitening systems which you can buy from dental clinics. These use a milder bleach to remove enamel stains and typically take at least a week to work. Prices start from about \$300.

The bleach solution is spread out on a tray that can be fitted over your teeth and has to be worn for about seven consecutive days, for about 30 minutes each time, to gradually whiten the teeth.

A single in-clinic session, which lasts from 60 to 90 minutes, is sufficient for results to show. Teeth will typically stay bleached for about eight

months to a year before they get stained again.

Pros:

- There are no major side effects to teeth whitening. Some patients may experience sensitivity in their teeth immediately after a whitening session but the sensation typically disappears in a day.
- It is a quick non-invasive fix for patients who want to brighten their smiles.

Cons:

- No matter which technique you choose, the whitest you can get your teeth to look will be its original milky white, so those who want brilliant white teeth have to consider another option – veneers (see page 14).
- The colour achieved is not permanent and slowly fades with time – from eight months to a year. Food and drink, including wine, coffee and curry, will gradually re-stain the teeth.
- Whitening is not suitable for those whose teeth are unevenly coloured as it does not even out patches and could emphasise the whiter parts.

Cost: From \$1,200 per session for laser teeth whitening, from The Implant And Oral Surgery Centre, 08-07 Camden Medical Centre.

EXPERTS SHARE TIPS ON PROPER ORAL HYGIENE

◆ Brush your teeth in a vertical direction from the gums towards the edges of your teeth. This will help to remove lodged food particles and plaque from between your teeth.

It is incorrect to brush your teeth horizontally as you will not be able to get into the crevices between your teeth. This may also lead to receding gums.

◆ Choose a toothbrush with soft rounded bristles as a hard-bristled brush can wear down enamel and hurt your gums, causing tooth erosion and sensitivity.

◆ It is ideal to brush your teeth after every meal but if you cannot, brush your teeth every morning and night.

◆ Floss your teeth every night to ensure all lodged food particles are completely removed.

◆ Eating fibre-rich fruit and vegetables can encourage more chewing and saliva flow, which will help clean your mouth and prevent bacteria activity that causes decay and bad breath.

◆ Sugar in food and drinks is a source of food for the bacteria in the mouth.

When a person eats large amounts of sugar, he provides a constant supply of food for bacteria in the mouth which feeds on the sugar and produces acids that attack the tooth enamel.

This slowly dissolves minerals in the tooth structure and weakens it over time.

Limit your sugar intake and rinse your mouth after taking sugary or acidic food.

◆ Teeth-staining food and drinks include coffee, wine, curry and soya sauce.

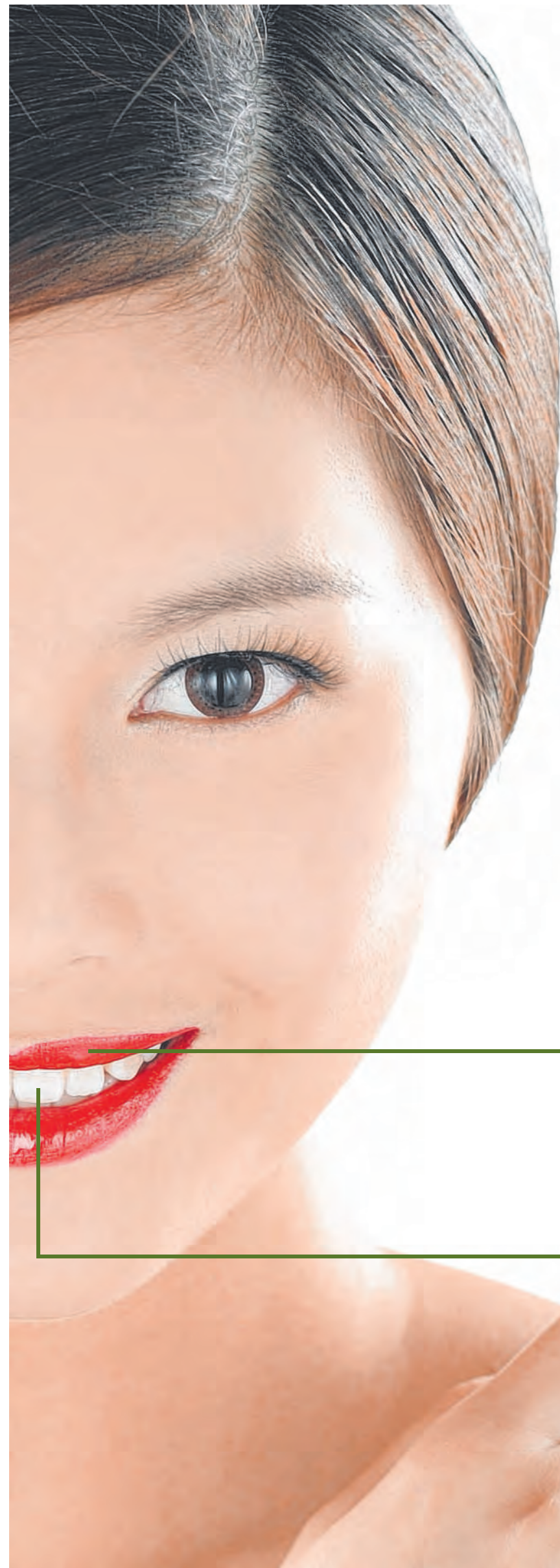
If you must consume them, drink some plain water as soon as possible after eating, swishing it in your mouth before you swallow.

This helps to rinse away these substances from your teeth so they will not stain them.

Information provided by Dr Tan Ching Ching, associate consultant of the periodontic unit at the department of restorative dentistry at the National Dental Centre of Singapore; and Dr Christina Sim, senior consultant of the prosthodontic unit at the department of restorative dentistry at the National Dental Centre of Singapore.

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Photographer: ASHLEIGH SIM; Art direction: JEROME AWASTHI; Hair and make-up: FION TAN (9109-2777) using RMK; Model: QIAN/Mannequin



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LIP RESHAPING

What's new: Instead of injecting fillers to add volume to the entire lip, which could give the appearance of "fish lips", doctors can reshape the silhouette of the lips by creating a Cupid's Bow.

This is done by injecting a filler into the middle of the upper lip and shaping it for a more prominent pout.

If you reveal too much of your gums when you smile, commonly referred to as a "gummy smile", Botox can be injected to relax the muscle beside the nose that elevates the lip when smiling.

Botox can also be injected into the jawline to slim down the appearance of the jaw for a more feminine look.

Pros:

- Instant results without downtime.

Previously, surgical procedures such as gum recontouring was needed to correct a gummy smile.

Cons:

- Both procedures are not permanent and last for only about six months before the lips return to the original shape.
- A common side effect of Botox and filler jabs is bruising, which will take about a week to heal.

Some patients may feel weakness in their jaws after the Botox jabs and have difficulty chewing hard food for about a week.

Cost: From \$100 for a Botox jab and from \$900 for a filler jab, from Singapore Aesthetic Centre, 08-12 Novena Medical Centre.

VENEERS

What's new: Many are no longer content with the natural off-white colour of their teeth but want the blinding smiles of Hollywood celebrities.

This porcelain white shade can be achieved only by bonding a ceramic shell, called a veneer, to the teeth.

Veneers can be stained to the desired shade of white, which range from milky white to snow white.

A thin layer of tooth enamel is removed before the veneer is permanently fixed to the tooth. This prevents the teeth from being too thick after the veneers are put in place. The tooth will not be harmed if this procedure is done properly.

Traditionally, veneers were used to reshape chipped teeth or for extremely yellowed teeth.

New materials used for making veneers include lucite and zirconia, the same substance used to make synthetic diamonds.

They are stronger and more chip-resistant than ceramic. You can also get your dentist to customise the shape of your veneers to alter the shape of your teeth.

For instance, rounded teeth are said to make you look gentler while square teeth will make you look more assertive.

Pros:

- This is a permanent way to whiten teeth. The veneers will not be stained by food and drink the way normal teeth are. Any stains can easily be brushed off with regular toothpaste.
- Unevenly shaped teeth can also be permanently reshaped.

Cons:

- Veneers are more brittle than teeth, so people with veneers have to avoid biting into hard food, such as nuts and ice, to prevent them from chipping.
- With ceramic veneers priced from at least \$1,000 per tooth, they are the most costly cosmetic solution for teeth.

New materials, such as lucite and zirconia, cost about 50 per cent more than traditional ceramic veneers.

Cost: From \$1,284 per tooth, from The Dental Studio, 13-01 Paragon.

Information provided by Dr Arthur Lim, specialist orthodontist at The Implant And Oral Surgery Centre in Camden Medical Centre; Dr Melvin Mark Chia, chief dental surgeon at Tooth Angels & Co Dental Surgeons; Dr Vivien Tan, senior consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Dental Clinic; Dr Lynette Ng, dental director and prosthodontist at The Dental Studio, a subsidiary of Singapore Medical Group; Dr Yeak Hwee Lee, medical director at Singapore Aesthetic Centre, a subsidiary of Singapore Medical Group.

CLEARLY A WINNER

Beauty queen and parttime model Kyla Tan decided to put on braces to look better in close-up photos

When Ms Kyla Tan decided in July that she would straighten her teeth through orthodontics, she – pun fully intended – braced herself for the worst.

A beauty queen and part-time model, she knew her looks were her calling card.

Says Ms Tan, who is completing her final semester in chemistry and biochemistry at Nanyang Technological University: "I figured I would get fewer modelling jobs and could take a break from joining pageants while my braces were on. I can also concentrate on my last term in school."

But the 22-year-old may not have to give up her sideline. Instead of conventional metal braces, she chose SimpliClear braces, which are made of a transparent plastic. Even though they are fixed to the outside of her teeth, they are barely visible.

SimpliClear braces, which were developed by local company Biomers, cost up to \$6,000, while traditional metal braces cost up to \$5,000.

They can be used on anybody who is eligible for conventional braces.



ST PHOTO: ASHLEIGH SIM
Kyla Tan, 22, opted for braces made of transparent plastic as they are not as obvious as the traditional metal ones.

Despite her initial apprehension, Ms Tan made it to the finals of this year's New Paper New Face competition held last week. She has also landed a steady stream of modelling jobs over the past few months. These include a Volkswagen roadshow as well as print ads for SingTel and smartphone brand HTC.

"For events and runway shows, I would be too far away for the braces to be obvious. As for photo shoots,

I just have to be more aware of the braces and not grin too widely," says Ms Tan, who holds the Miss Singapore International 2010 title.

In fact, she says, the New Paper New Face coordinators did not even realise she had braces on until she was shortlisted for the finals and showed up for a fitting.

The self-described geek and tomboy says she began taking part in beauty pageants three years ago to brush up on her people skills and gain confidence in communicating with others.

Every small flaw counts when you trade on your looks, she says.

She recalls: "In 2008, a friend, who is also a model, commented that I would look better in close-up photographs if my teeth were straighter."

She had always toyed with the idea of correcting her "slightly misaligned" front teeth, but never did so because she did not want to wear metal braces for at least a year.

When she found out about SimpliClear this year, she decided to take the plunge.

Besides having to watch what she eats so that she does not stain her transparent braces – she avoids eating curry, chilli or food with soya sauce in public – she barely notices that she is wearing braces.

Her teeth will feel "slightly sore" for a few days after each monthly visit to the dentist to get the wires replaced, but the discomfort is bearable, she says.

She is looking forward to the day – sometime next year – when she can take off her braces and face the world with a set of straight teeth.

"Having a nicer smile will benefit my modelling career as my photos can be taken from more angles," she says.

"But what is even more important is how much more confident my smile will be, when I have straight teeth."

~ KAREN TEE