

Teens take dental care into their own hands, with questionable results

April 29 2017, by Sammy Caiola, The Sacramento Bee

In this age of do-it-yourself everything, orthodontists say teeth straightening is one task you should leave to the professionals.

Inspired by [social media](#), some people are turning to rubber bands, fishing line and paper clips to perfect their own pearly whites - a practice that orthodontists warn could lead to gum irritation, misalignment and tooth loss.

A quick search on YouTube reveals thousands of tutorials about how to straighten teeth without braces, many posted by users who appear to be teenagers. People online say they've successfully closed spaces in their smiles by stretching small rubber hairbands over their teeth to pull them closer together. Others recommend do-it-yourself molds and retainers, which are widely available for purchase online.

While these beautifying projects might be cheap at first, they carry a risk that could ultimately cost thousands of dollars, said Dr. Jeffrey Kwong, an El Dorado Hills, Calif., orthodontist. If a [rubber band](#) slides to the top or bottom of the teeth and wedges into the gum line, retrieving it is nearly impossible without professional help, Kwong said. If left in the gums, the band can cause an infection or weaken the ligaments around the tooth to the point where it falls out.

"The rubber band will start chewing away at the ligaments and making the tooth become loose," Kwong said. "We only have so much gum tissue. If the teeth are moved too far beyond the point of where there are

hard tissues, that could be a problem as well."

A recent survey from the American Association of Orthodontists found that 13 percent of orthodontists are seeing patients who have tried DIY teeth straightening. The organization could not provide numbers on how many patients experienced dental problems after their experiments, but said in a statement that "some of these DIY teeth straightening attempts have caused severe damage including [tooth loss](#) and leading to costly repairs."

This spring, the organization put out a consumer alert warning orthodontists and parents to look out for the worrying trend.

Brandon Andre, a 24-year-old musician and photographer from Los Angeles, said he doesn't see the danger. Last summer, Andre wanted to close the gap between his two front teeth but couldn't afford to see an orthodontist, he said. Instead he purchased elastic hair bands for \$5, which he placed on his teeth daily for about six weeks. After some soreness and bleeding, the teeth started moving closer together, he said.

Andre detailed his experience in a nine-minute YouTube video, which has more than 273,000 views. He did address the possibilities of long-term damage in the video but said it wasn't a problem for him.

"It wasn't enough to sway me to not want to do it," Andre said of the orthodontists' warnings. "Luckily for me I was successful and had no problems, and it totally changed how I felt about my image. But it's not going to work for everybody."

Most people try the "gap band" method because they're self-conscious about their teeth but don't have the money to purchase braces, Andre said. Braces cost somewhere between \$3,000 and \$7,000 depending on insurance contributions, according to the Consumer Guide for Dentistry.

While not everyone who tries to straighten their own teeth will cause damage, Kwong warns anyone considering it to consult a professional and not take the risk.

"People get lucky sometimes," he said. "It's hard to predict who's going to be lucky and who's not going to be lucky. If (these kids) miss something, if they don't catch something, if something happens, it's tens of thousands of dollars in dental work to fix these problems. And some things may be irreversible."

Dr. Kelly Giannetti, a Sacramento, Calif., [orthodontist](#), said she's recently seen patients who tried to fit themselves for a night guard or snore guard, which can result in misaligning the "bite" between the top and bottom teeth. She believes orthodontists might be seeing more of those cases because of social media.

"Sometimes, especially nowadays, most kids get a lot of their information online, watching YouTube videos," she said. "Everything right now tends to lean more toward DIY. Sometimes they don't realize [teeth](#) are part of your health, and health isn't a good thing to do yourself."

©2017 The Sacramento Bee (Sacramento, Calif.)
Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Teens take dental care into their own hands, with questionable results (2017, April 29) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-04-teens-dental-results.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--