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Virtual model makes it easier to align teeth right, orthodontist says

Posted by [Yvonne Betowt](#) December 04, 2008 7:30 AM

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Eleven-year-old Emma Goodwin smiled broadly, showing off her new purple and pink braces.



photos by Glenn Baeske / Huntsville Times

Dr. Alan Jones talks braces with 11-year-old Emma Goodwin. Jones uses the newest concept in braces - OrthoCAD iQ. It creates a virtual model of the patient's mouth. Then, using computer guidance technology, the orthodontist can determine the precise location for each brace, eliminating the guesswork that came with the traditional method.

"It was easy," said the Westminster Christian Academy student who is a recipient of the newest concept in braces - OrthoCAD iQ - which she received from long-time Huntsville orthodontist Alan Jones.

The iQ, as Jones calls it, creates a virtual model of the patient's mouth. Then, using computer guidance technology, the orthodontist can determine the precise location for each brace, eliminating the guesswork that came with the traditional method. Not only does it reduce the installation time, but it requires fewer visits for adjustments and most importantly, up to a third less time spent wearing the braces.

For Emma, the new digital orthodontics concept is "cool."

But her mom, Connie Goodwin, remembers it was not "cool" when she wore braces as a teenager.

"People called you wire mouth or train tracks," said Connie. "And it hurt a lot after each visit."

Until about four years ago when digital orthodontics became available, braces were put on patients' teeth one at a time. Now, the bands are placed in an impression-type plate and installed simultaneously on the teeth.

"Technology has advanced very far," said Connie Goodwin. "I thought it sounded like a good idea and so far, it has been a good experience. Dr. Jones made us feel very comfortable and explained everything to us in detail."

Although it didn't take much to convince the Goodwins about the new technology, at first Jones said he was "somewhat skeptical." He didn't even charge his patients for the new technology the first 10 months he used it.

"This technology is the only one available to give you the end view," said Jones. "But having the concept of a finished product was something that was difficult to comprehend at first. The company wanted me to market it, but how would I know if it worked until I tried it first?"

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After just a few months and seeing his patients' teeth quickly move into position made a believer out of Jones, the only orthodontist in North Alabama using digital orthodontics on a regular basis.

"This is the only way we will do braces now," said Jones. "I've visited about 30 family dentists and other orthodontists to show them this concept. It is amazing and I have a lot of confidence in it."

The cost is approximately \$4,600, but may range in price depending on the magnitude of the dental problem and the length of time wearing the braces

It still doesn't eliminate the need for wires and rubber bands, said Jones, but it does help make wearing braces less painful than the traditional method. The bands are sealed with a light-cured adhesive compared to a chemical-cured adhesive for the original braces.



A patient's braces are attached to the teeth by ultraviolet light-cured adhesive.

"The wires are not as brittle or stiff as the metal wires," said Jones. "It takes only four seconds to seal the band compared to 40 seconds with the previous adhesive -10 times longer than now."

For orthodontic patient Jill Basilone, it is the second time around for braces. The first time was the traditional method while this time she is going high-tech.

"This is much better," said Basilone, a sophomore at Sparkman High School. "It didn't hurt as much getting them on as it did before."

But her problem is more than just crooked teeth. She has an extended jaw bone and will have to undergo oral surgery to correct it after wearing the braces for six months. When she recovers from the surgery, she will return to the braces.

"This was much better than the first time," said Jill. "It was less painful and quicker."

Another braces alumni, Shaneva Davis, is returning to get invisalign braces which are removable and doesn't require digital technology.

However, if her 14-year-old daughter, Kya Walton, consents to braces, she will be going the high-tech route along with the rest of Jones' patients. He has already used it on some 300 patients during the last 18 months.

"It's amazing," said Davis. "It just blows my mind. Kids have no concept on how it's changed."

Kya is not so convinced.

"I don't want braces," said the Fellowship Christian Academy student.

"She's afraid of getting her teeth pulled," said her mom who moved to Huntsville from Alaska while wearing braces as a teenager. Jones finished her braces the first time which is why she returned to him again.

After getting her first set of braces removed, she was given a retainer to wear for a year. But after a short time, she accidentally threw it away at a wedding reception. Her mom refused to pay for another one.

Jill Terry, a patient manager for Jones, said the entire procedure takes about an hour.

To Jones, this is the biggest improvement he's witnessed in 23 years as an orthodontist.

"We were outsourcing a lot more lab work than now," said Jones. "This is much cleaner and neater as far as oral hygiene is concerned. I feel I'm doing a better job with my patients than I was two years ago. They have a much more polished look when finished."

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