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# 'Robot-brace' wages war on crooked teeth

*Matt Rudd* Published: 29 January 2012



The smile is serious business across the pond and the latest weapon in the

Prices at the Elleven clinic just off Harley Street in London start at £3,450 (Getty)

American war against physical imperfection is a customised brace built with NASA-designed wire-and-robot technology. The Texas-based company behind the technology claims it can cut the length of time you have to wear your metal tracks by half – good news for embarrassed teenagers, bad news for cash-strapped parents. Ten thousand Americans have already paid a premium to have a Suresmile brace fitted. As of this month, it is also launching in Britain.

Prices at the exclusive Elleven clinic just off Harley Street in London start at £3,450, a £500 mark-up from their standard brace treatments. The process begins with a 3D scan of the mouth. Software then transforms your Austin Powers into a virtual Julia Roberts (or as near as possible given the raw materials).

Once you've approved your new look, the computer works out the differential between the

coordinates of the crooked teeth and the perfectly aligned teeth before plotting the most efficient route between the two. The scan is then sent to a robot in Berlin which bends an advanced alloy wire into the precise shape required to set your teeth on the road to A-list perfection.

“If you need braces, you don’t need to worry about having them on for so long now,” says Dr Sameer Patel, one of the three partners at the Elleven practice. “The actual movement is more strategic. You’re moving the individual teeth direct from A to B rather than zig-zagging towards the shape you want. That’s why it’s so much quicker.”

The British Orthodontic Society estimates that as many as 400,000 children receive treatment on the NHS each year. In order to qualify, they must score higher than 3.6 out of five on an index of treatment need. Everyone else must pay. Nevertheless, orthodontics for purely cosmetic reasons is on the rise. The society estimates that an unprecedented 600,000 people – adults as well as children – will pay to go private this year.

The robot-brace is one of several options now available to those prepared to flash the credit card – and celebrities, always at the pioneering end of cosmetic improvement, appear to be leading the rush into teeth-straightening. Pop star Cheryl Cole wore a £3,000 removable plastic “Invisalign” brace as part of an estimated £200,000 makeover. Myleene Klass, the model and musician, wore a lingual brace which fits to the back of the teeth rather than the front.

“One thing I’ve learned is that superficial looks aren’t going to carry you through,” she said recently. “It’s inner confidence.” Fashion designer Sadie Frost, model Kelly Brook and TV presenter Steve Jones also opted for the “secret brace.” And of course the Duchess of Cambridge went to a pioneering French dentist specialising in “harmonious symmetry” to have her teeth micro-rotated to perfection.

The proletariat will have to endure Ugly Betty metal mouths for a while longer. It is unlikely the NHS, which currently pays an average of about £1,200 per orthodontic patient, will finance more advanced and much more expensive technologies. “If we went down that road, you would find that two thirds of children currently getting braces would be rejected because the budget would be used up on expensive materials,” says Eddie Crouch, a spokesman for the British Dental Association.

“If anything, we’re heading the other way. I can see a point where the government only makes orthodontics available to the most severe cases on the NHS.”

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