

“ I love what I do.”

■ alumni profile

Dentistry's ambassador

An award-winning orthodontist, Dr. Manal Ibrahim explains why braces are a medical necessity for good health

She calls it a “dental destination,” because the office is as big as an airport terminal with more than 100 staff. For many, Dr. Manal Ibrahim, DDS '93, EDW '98, herself is the destination here, the go-to name in the soup-to-nuts practice. She has been featured as a “Top Chicago Orthodontist” by *Chicago* magazine and named “Best Dentist” in Naperville, Ill., for four years running. Ibrahim also has



profile

an assessment (as does the American Association of Orthodontists). “If everything is fine, I’ll give you a high five that you’re awesome, and see you every year until you have your adult teeth,” Ibrahim says. She argues that an early orthodontia visit can help stave off future problems and cites failure to follow up as parents’ No. 1 mistake.

“There can be valid reasons—timing, financial,” Ibrahim says. “But it’s the most difficult part for me. We recommend treatment, then the patient comes back several years later with the damage or destruction we predicted. Then we have to be reactive instead of proactive.”

A native of Alexandria, Egypt, Ibrahim came to the Chicago area at age 9 with her parents and hoped to earn a Ph.D. in prostheses. In her senior year of college, a friend in dental school called and said, “I think you’d love [dentistry]!” So I made a split-second decision to switch.”

Her impressive CV is packed with all of her subsequent training and education. Ibrahim earned a specialty degree in prosthodontics (full-mouth reconstruction), taught at the UIC College of Dentistry, joined a private practice in Skokie, got another degree in orthodontics at NYU, then, in 2006, joined Innovative Orthodontic Centers in Naperville.

During an office tour, we run into her husband, Dr. Anthony Lavacca, who is also a dentist here and with whom she has two sons. Ibrahim delights in showing off the scope of the practice—everything from various specialties and relaxing “spa” rooms—each named after a world capital—to the kiddie lounges. She waves to everyone and they all return her greeting with perfect smiles.

“I love what I do,” Ibrahim says. “I’m passionate about my profession. I can’t picture doing anything else.”
—Jonathan Black

The goal of orthodontics, says Dr. Manal Ibrahim, “is not for people to get a great smile—but ... to prevent unnecessary [dental] trauma and breakdown from wear and tear.”

earned the elite “Diplomate” honor handed out to a select few by the American Board of Orthodontics.

Most important, certainly to her, is the passion she brings to her practice.

“Orthodontics has changed a lot,” Ibrahim says. “It is so important to me to get that message out to the public. Many consumers think [orthodontics] is a commodity product—braces are braces are braces. Even many practitioners don’t know anything else is out there.”

“What’s out there” catches your eye as soon as you enter her sprawling Naperville office. “Congratulations to Dr. Ibrahim,” reads a prominent sign. “A Top 1% Invisalign Provider.”

Invisalign is a series of removable trays that encase the teeth in a clear rigid plastic, offering an alternative to metal braces. Because Invisalign is clear, says Ibrahim, “many mistakenly equate it to cosmetic. It’s orthodontic.

It provides incredible control that braces don’t. It makes brushing and flossing a snap. It’s very efficient, treatment times are often shorter, results can be better and prices in my practice are comparable.”

Ibrahim is a big promoter of Invisalign, but she also does braces, which some patients, especially teen girls, like for the “bling factor,” she says. Others opt for braces because Invisalign is a “compliance product,” meaning wearers have to take the trays out and put them back in. Whichever method patients choose, Ibrahim stresses that the goal of orthodontics “is not for people to get a great smile—mind you, you will always end up with an amazing smile—but a medical necessity to prevent unnecessary [dental] trauma and breakdown from wear and tear.”

Ibrahim recommends that parents bring in their children at age 7 for

Lloyd DeGrane