

Orthodontic Treatment

Congratulations on completing your orthodontic treatment!

To protect your investment and keep that smile beautiful for a lifetime, the phase of care that starts now is just as important as the treatment itself. Here are your essential instructions for life after braces or aligners.

1. The Golden Rule: Wear Your Retainer!

This is the most important part of your post-treatment care. Your teeth have a "memory" and will try to move back to their original positions (this is called "**relapse**"). Your retainer is the only thing that will prevent this.

Follow Your Schedule: Your orthodontist will give you a specific schedule. It usually involves two phases:

Phase 1 (Full-Time): You will likely need to wear your retainers full-time (20-22 hours a day) for the first several months, removing them only to eat, drink (anything other than water), and clean your teeth.

Phase 2 (Night-Time for Life): After your teeth have stabilized, your orthodontist will likely tell you to switch to wearing your retainers only at night. This is considered a lifetime commitment to keep your smile straight.

Speaking: You may lisp or notice more saliva for the first few days. This is normal! Practice speaking, reading aloud, or singing, and your mouth will adapt quickly.

If You Forget: If you forget to wear your retainer for a night or two, you may feel some pressure when you put it back in. This is a sign your teeth are already trying to move! If your retainer feels extremely tight or doesn't fit, call our office immediately.

2. How to Care for Your Retainers

Proper care keeps your retainers clean, clear, and in good shape.

Cleaning (Removable Retainers):

Clean your retainer every day.

Use a soft-bristled toothbrush (a separate one from your regular toothbrush) and cool (not hot) water. You can use a mild, clear, unscented dish soap.

Do not use toothpaste, as its abrasive ingredients can scratch the plastic.

You can use a specialized "retainer cleaner" or "denture cleaner" for a deep soak 1-2 times a week, directed.

Cleaning (Fixed/Permanent Retainers):

This **wire bonded to the back of your teeth** requires extra attention.

You must use a floss threader or an interproximal (proxy) brush to clean under the wire every day to prevent plaque buildup and gum problems.

Storage (The "Case" Rule):

When your retainer is not in your mouth, it must be in its case.

Never wrap it in a napkin (this is the #1 way retainers are accidentally thrown away) or put it in your pocket (it will break).

Keep the case away from pets. They are attracted to the smell and will chew them.

3. What to Expect in the First Few Weeks

Sensitivity: Your teeth and gums may be sensitive for several days. The enamel is newly exposed, and the ligaments that hold your teeth are settling. This is normal and will fade. Using a toothpaste for sensitive teeth can help.

The **"New" Bite:** Your bite will feel different and new. It may take a few days to get used to chewing without brackets or aligners.

Gum Health: Your gums might be slightly swollen or inflamed. Now that you can brush and floss easily, a thorough and gentle hygiene routine will make them healthy and firm within a week or two.

"White Spots": You may notice small, white, chalky spots on your teeth. These are areas of decalcification (early-stage cavities) that formed around the brackets due to plaque. Your dentist can discuss options like special fluoride treatments or other cosmetic solutions if needed.

4. Your New Hygiene and Dental Routine

Schedule a Professional Cleaning: This is a top priority! Call your general dentist and schedule a full exam and cleaning.

Brush and Floss: It's so much easier now! Enjoy being able to floss normally. Maintain a great routine of brushing twice a day and flossing once a day.

When to Call Us:

A Note on Speed: The sooner you call us about a lost or broken retainer, the better. Teeth can start to shift in as little as 24 hours.