



Cleaning your teeth is extremely important even when not wearing braces. But when wearing braces, it becomes even more important and more challenging. Once you have braces, extra effort must be put into proper brushing and flossing.

## Brushing

The presence of braces on your teeth will physically prevent your tooth brush from easily accessing certain areas, particularly, the areas between your gums and the braces and underneath the arch wire which connects each bracket. Therefore, you must learn new techniques for accessing these areas.

- Buy a new tooth brush (the softest Crest brand is highly recommended). It must be very soft to reach under the wires and braces!
- Brushing with tooth paste and flossing should be performed after every meal. It is best to avoid eating in between meals.
- The goal of brushing is to remove all bacterial plaque which forms on the teeth and braces.
- When wearing braces you must focus on brushing each bracket on all four sides and then check to verify that all areas have been cleaned.
- Use very short brushing strokes and work the bristles of the brush underneath the wire and brackets, in between all teeth, and underneath the gums.
- To verify that you have been successful, use a disclosing agent (Dr. Reising will supply these tablets). The disclosing agent will preferentially stain plaque red so that missed areas are easily visible. Then you can simply brush away the red areas. If you do not detect any red stained plaque, congratulations on doing a great job.
- Doctor Reising recommends using a leading brand tartar control tooth paste such as Crest or Colgate. These pastes contain the most effective formulations of abrasives and tartar inhibitors. Try to avoid gimmicky brands, especially those without the ADA seal.

## Avoid Sugary Foods and Beverages

Eating any type of sugar or sweets will rapidly accelerate plaque formation because the sugar is the favorite food of the bacteria! Bacterial plaque damages your teeth by secreting acid onto the surface of the tooth enamel. The acid produced by the plaque literally dissolves the tooth enamel as water dissolves table salt or sugar. Production of acid by the bacteria occurs as a direct consequence of exposure to sugars!

When the enamel is even lightly damaged by plaque acid, the enamel surface loses translucency and a chalky white spot is produced which is analogous to "scarring" of the tooth. This is referred to as a localized decalcification and is a permanent and very unsightly defect.

There are methods of removing these unsightly spots on the teeth once braces are removed. However, these methods require removal of the damaged enamel. Tooth enamel is irreplaceable and once lost, it cannot be reformed. Instead, restorative materials (bonding agents) are used to replace the lost enamel. Although quite effective, if extensive repair work is required, it can be quite expensive. Fortunately, avoiding damage to the enamel is quite simple if one is diligent with hygiene practices.

## Brush your tongue

Good hygiene practices should always include a thorough brushing of the tongue. Often overlooked by adolescents, tongue brushing is vital to maintaining fresh breath and reducing the amount of bacteria in your mouth. This is because the same bacteria that form plaque on the teeth also form a plaque on the dorsum of the tongue. This plaque often appears as a white-ish color film on the dorsum of the tongue and may often become discolored by food or drink (especially coffee). The bacteria secrete noxious waste products that cause bad breath. Tongue plaque can be even more difficult to remove than tooth plaque and often requires many vigorous cycles of brushing and rinsing...brushing and rinsing. Brushing and rinsing should continue until only the natural pinkish flesh color of the tongue is visible.

## Flossing

When flossing, many will find it arduous to thread floss underneath the wire. Its tough but it must be done regularly! You are otherwise placing your dental health at great risk because you are far more likely to get a cavity between your teeth when wearing braces.

To make it easier to floss and clean under braces, a number helpful products are available at drug stores and grocery stores. A "floss threader" works on the same premise as a sewing needle and greatly simplifies flossing by allowing you to easily thread the floss under the arch wire of your braces. Oral B manufactures SuperFloss which is floss with a rigid end designed to be threaded underneath the braces and it's a little easier than using a separate piece of floss with a floss-threader. Gore also makes a similar product called "Glide Threader". Other similar products are likely available which allow for easier flossing.

Oral B also makes two kinds of inter-dental brushes. These little brushes look like pipe cleaners and are designed for accessing difficult to reach areas of your braces.

## Bleeding Gums

When brushing and flossing, always look for areas of bleeding from your gums. Bleeding is a sign of inflammation and is a definite indication that your gums are infected and that you are not cleaning the area adequately. Do not be alarmed by the bleeding. But be sure to pay extra close attention to cleaning areas that bleed. If you clean these areas regularly, the bleeding will stop in a matter of weeks as the inflammation resolves and the area heals. Bleeding is a sign of infection and irritation from the bacterial plaque which accumulates in every crevice in your mouth. It will only be resolved by mechanical cleaning (brushing and flossing). While anti-bacterial rinses can help speed the process of healing, they certainly cannot cure the problem alone. Rinses that you buy at the store can be good adjuncts to brushing and flossing but should never be considered as a substitute.