

# Retainer Instructions

Retainers are forever!

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Removal of braces does not indicate the end of orthodontic treatment, only the end of the active phase of treatment. After the active appliances (whether braces, invisalign, or other appliances) are discontinued, a passive appliance must be worn to maintain the orthodontic correction. Otherwise, the teeth are likely to move back to their original mal-aligned positions. Relapse is most likely to occur immediately following active treatment. Stability of the teeth increases the longer (number of years) a patient continues to wear retainers.

## How often do I need to wear my retainer?

Permanent retainers are bonded to the teeth and therefore, cannot be removed by the patient. On the other hand, it is the patient's responsibility to wear removable retainers! For the first year after braces are removed, removable retainers should be worn "full time" (every day and every night). However, removable retainers must be removed briefly for eating, brushing, and cleaning. Also, it is OK to periodically remove a retainer for brief periods when speaking or esthetics are of particular importance.

## How long are retainers needed?

Full time wear of retainers is recommended for a minimum of 12 months following discontinuation of active treatment and then at least nighttime wear, every night, indefinitely thereafter. It should be assumed that retention (maintenance) of orthodontic correction is a lifetime endeavor. There are no guarantees that your teeth will stay straight if you stop wearing your retainer even after many faithful years. Even those who have never had orthodontic treatment may discover that their teeth begin to crowd as years go by. Throughout life, the body never stops changing and this includes the teeth! But as long as retainers are worn and periodically inspected, your beautiful smile can be maintained. Its up to you!

## Caring for your removable retainers:

Hawley retainers are made of acrylic type plastic and embedded stainless steel wires. The plastic portion is quite brittle and vulnerable to breakage. The wires, while not brittle, will easily distort if undue pressure is applied. Avoid pulling on or bending the wires as this can easily cause them to become distorted and fit improperly. Clean your retainer by brushing it with your toothbrush and toothpaste (use a name brand tartar control toothpaste). Retainers should always be cleaned after removal from the mouth (at least twice per day if wearing full time and once in the morning if wearing only at night). If the retainer cannot be brushed immediately at least rinse it with water to remove saliva. The retainer will accumulate the same bacterial plaque that forms on your teeth. If not regularly cleaned, this plaque can be identified as a white film on the retainer. If you notice any white accumulations on your retainer, then cleaning has not been adequate. If you get accumulations on your retainer that won't come off, we can remove it in the office by ultrasonic cleaning in a special solution.

## Do not attempt novel cleaning methods.

Do not soak your retainer in any type of cleaning solution. Do not subject your retainer to hot or boiling water – the plastic portion will easily distort and thereby ruin your retainer. Don't leave your retainer inside the car during the summer – it can get hot enough to distort the plastic.

## Dogs love to chew on retainers!

They are attracted by the smell and will often leap onto counter-tops to retrieve them. Therefore, always placed your retainer in its case and place it in the medicine cabinet when not wearing it. Retainers are often lost in restaurants when left on a plate or wrapped in a napkin.

**Never wrap your retainer in a napkin**, as others are likely to assume it is trash and throw it away.

## Retainers should always be stored in a retainer case when not in the mouth!

If you notice that your retainer does not fit quite right, or that something feels different, schedule an appointment immediately to have it evaluated. It's not worth the risk of having your teeth move out of alignment. Problems are easy to avoid but costly to fix!

## Permanent Retainers

Because you cannot remove your permanent retainer, it is more difficult to adequately clean your teeth in the area where it is located. Therefore, extra diligence is required to maintain adequate hygiene. Your doctor will evaluate your hygiene at each retainer check appointment and will inform you if there are problems. Flossing can still be accomplished in the usual manner. Also, it is recommended that a floss threader be used regularly to thread floss underneath your retainer. Although considered permanent, breakage can occur that you may not notice! Therefore, it is important to return for follow up evaluations to have your retainer integrity evaluated and monitored - you may not know that there is a problem until it's too late and your teeth begin moving.