

EXPERT Advice

Retainers: Keeping Your Smile Perfect



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Imagine you just got your braces off and your teeth look absolutely perfect! Your teeth feel smooth, look amazing and everyone tells you they love your new smile. Now if you want to keep these amazing results, you will need retainers. You may ask, what are retainers and why are they so important? At Bedford Orthodontics, we talk about retainers every day.



Hawley removable retainer



Clear removable retainer



Retainers come in two basic varieties — fixed and removable. Fixed retainers are made up of a string of orthodontic wire that is perfectly adapted to the backside of the newly aligned teeth and bonded to these teeth with smooth spheres of tooth adhesive. Fixed retainers do not get removed by the patient and may be preferred by patients who do not want to have to remember to wear retainers. Removable retainers are ones that can be removed easily, as they are not glued to teeth. There are two types of removable retainers — ones that are made of totally clear, thin plastic, and ones that are a combination of orthodontic wire and acrylic. The latter, called Hawley retainers, are available in a large variety of colours and tend to last much longer than clear plastic ones. However, clear plastic retainers are definitely more aesthetic — you can hardly see them. All retainers are custom-made to fit each patient. You and your orthodontist will decide which type of a retainer will work best for you, your lifestyle and your new smile.

When braces first come off, removable retainers are worn full time, except for when eating, brushing, flossing and playing contact sports. Full time wear is very important during the first six months after braces come off. Studies

have shown that during this time period, the fibers in the gums that hold teeth are re-organizing and healing in their new positions. If retainers are not worn enough during this time, teeth will be very prone to relapse back to their mal-aligned positions. After the first six months, retainers can be worn less, and eventually can be worn only overnight.

Once you receive your retainers, you will require periodic checkups with your orthodontist to make sure that your retainers continue to fit well, that you are using them correctly, and that the retention protocol is working well for you. If you lose your retainer(s), then you will need to contact your orthodontist right away, as teeth will begin to move immediately during the first six months after braces come off, and within a day or two anytime thereafter.

Studies show that without retainers, not only do teeth try to shift back toward their original positions, but crowding also increases due to the ageing process. Without retainers, teeth will continue to shift unfavourably; therefore retainers need to be worn overnight indefinitely, or as long as we want teeth to be straight. Retainers are the key to keeping the wrinkles out of your teeth! ■