

# Retainers

Now that you have retainers you may have some questions you would like answered.

## What is a retainer?

All patients need to wear retainers after treatment. They can either be removable or fixed to the teeth. Your orthodontist will advise you which retainer you need. Retainers are designed to keep your teeth straight and it is important that you wear them as instructed.

## How might a removable retainer affect me?

Your speech will be different at first. Practice speaking with the retainer in place e.g. read out aloud at home on your own. Your speech should return to normal within a few days. To begin with you may produce more saliva and have to swallow more than usual. This is normal and should pass after a few days.

## How might a fixed retainer affect me?

You will need to take extra care to keep it clean. Your orthodontist will advise you.

## Why is it important that I wear a retainer?

Retainers are just as important as the braces that straightened your teeth. Now that your teeth are straight, wearing your retainers as advised by your orthodontist is very important. If you do not it is likely that your teeth will move. If this happens it may be difficult to correct and is unlikely to be allowed under the NHS.

## How long will I have to wear retainers?

This will vary depending on how your teeth looked before the orthodontic treatment started. However, as a general rule, you will be asked to wear a removable retainer for a minimum of 12 months. Your orthodontist will advise you when to wear your retainer. It is likely that if you stop wearing your retainers there will be some tooth movement. Changes in position of your teeth can continue throughout life and are part of the normal ageing process.

**The only way to permanently straight teeth is to wear a retainer on a part-time basis for life.**

## Can I remove the retainer?

Yes, if the retainer is a removable type. However, if you have been asked to wear it full-time, then it should only be removed for cleaning, contact sports and swimming. When it is not in your mouth it should be kept in a protective box. Do not click the retainer in and out with your tongue as this can cause it to break or become loose.

## Should I avoid certain foods/drinks

Whether you have been instructed to eat with your retainer in or out, you should take care to:

- Avoid sugary snacks/drinks between meals and at bed time.
- Avoid sticky, chewy or hard sweets, mints and sugared chewing gum.
- Avoid fizzy drinks including diet drinks and large amounts of fruit juice.
- Hard or chewy foods- such as apples, carrots and crusty bread- can damage your retainer- avoid them until you get them up first.

## What about tooth brushing?

Take the removable retainer out to clean your teeth. It is important that you brush your teeth well for at least 2 minutes, twice a day. Use a fluoride toothpaste. You should also gently clean the retainer with a toothbrush and cold water over a sink, taking care not to drop it. To further protect the teeth, use an alcohol-free fluoride mouth rinse daily at a different time to when you brush your teeth. Avoid eating or rinsing for 20 minutes after use. Sugary snacks/drinks and poor cleaning of your teeth and retainer may lead to permanent damage to your teeth.

## How often will I now need to be reviewed?

You will not need to be seen as often now that the retainers are in place. Under the NHS, your orthodontist is responsible for a retention period of 12 months. After this period, you will have to pay privately for continuing care or re-treatment as well as for any replacement/repair of retainers. Your orthodontist may ask you to sign a retention consent form.

## Do I need to see my regular dentist?

Yes. It is very important to visit your dentist regularly both during treatment and now you are wearing retainers. It is important for them to check your teeth for decay.

## What do I do if I play contact sport?

You may wish to have a new mouth guard now that you are wearing retainers. You should wear a mouth guard instead of your removable retainer when you play contact sports. This will also be the case if you take part in activities requiring a protective helmet e.g. skateboarding, horse riding. Remove your retainer for swimming as well. When not in your mouth, the retainer should be kept in a protective box. Ask your orthodontist for further advice.

## What do I do if my retainer breaks or I lose it?

Ring up for an appointment as soon as possible. Do not wait for your next review appointment as your teeth may move whilst you are not able to wear your retainers. You may be charged a fee for its repair/replacement.

## REMEMBER

- Bring your retainers to every visit.
- Retainer wear is your personal responsibility
- Some patients will need to wear retainers long-term i.e. for life, to keep their teeth straight
- Contact your dentist/orthodontist as soon as possible if you damage or lose your retainer
- You may have to pay for any retainer repair or replacement
- Brush your teeth for 2 minutes at least twice a day
- Avoid sugary snacks and drinks between meals and at bedtime