



Oral Care for the Orthodontic Patient

The purpose of orthodontic treatment is to create a healthy, functional bite that allows straight teeth to properly meet opposing teeth in the opposite jaw. Crooked or crowded teeth make it harder to bite, to chew, and to speak and makes it more difficult to clean your teeth.

The importance of brushing and flossing

Proper oral care is important to preventing gingivitis, the early stage of gum disease. Symptoms of gum disease may include bleeding and swollen gums; red, swollen, and tender gums; and bad breath. When you have braces it takes more time and effort to clean your teeth as the wires and brackets prevent direct action of the toothbrush and floss. To brush your teeth with braces, gently move the toothbrush back and forth to remove food debris and bacterial plaque using a 45-degree angle with the bristles pointed toward the gumline and then brush on top of the brackets and below the brackets to remove plaque around this area and the elastics. Focus next on the space between the teeth and being as thorough as possible. Pay particular attention to the area where the gums and teeth meet since this is where damaging plaque accumulates, and gingivitis can occur. It may take more than the normal two minutes to brush your teeth well when braces or other orthodontic appliances are in place.

Flossing daily is also important. Floss threaders can help to maneuver the dental floss between wires, brackets, and the teeth. Interproximal brushes (little Christmas tree like brushes) are an alternative to traditional floss because they can slip under the arch wire. Additionally, oral irrigators or water flossers can be utilized to flush out debris and anti-cavity fluoride rinses provide added protection.

Steps include:

- Brush at least three times per day (to remove food debris and plaque).
- Use a soft, round-bristle toothbrush.
 - ✓ A manual toothbrush can do the job, but you may want to consider an electric toothbrush. Your dentist or hygienist can help you decide on the right toothbrush for you.
- Floss daily (use a floss threader).
- Use an interproximal brush if you have space between the teeth.
- Use an oral irrigator (apply an antimicrobial agent in the reservoir to help kill plaque biofilm).
- Rinse with an anti-cavity fluoride rinse.
- Have your teeth cleaned and examined regularly while having orthodontic treatment

Eating healthy foods is imperative for those who wear braces. A balanced diet of nutritious foods and limited between-meal snacks should be maintained.

Foods and drinks to avoid are:

- popcorn
- corn on the cob

- jellybeans
- taffy
- nuts
- gum
- hard candy
- caramel
- ice
- sticky food
- sugary drinks and juices

In the past, orthodontic treatment was mostly provided for children and teens, but today many adults seek orthodontic treatment to correct long-standing problems, or problems that stem from maturational changes. Orthodontists can help people of any age achieve a healthy, functional, and beautiful smile.

Most orthodontic patients receive orthodontic appliances called retainers to wear after their braces are removed. Be sure and clean these thoroughly after removing and before placing back in the mouth.

Resources

American Dental Association – Mouth Healthy

<https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/o/Orthodontics>

Colgate

<https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/kids-oral-care/how-to-clean-braces>

American Association of Orthodontist

https://www.aaoinfo.org/_/why-you-should-get-orthodontic-treatment/