



Oral Hygiene

Successful orthodontic treatment and a healthy, beautiful smile is the result of a team effort involving you, your orthodontist and your family dentist. You, as the patient, play the key role. Most importantly, you must keep your teeth clean and maintain good dental hygiene between appointments and while you're wearing braces. Proper dental care will take a little extra time and effort, but it's well worth it, and will help you enjoy the best possible results from your orthodontic treatment. Closely follow the instructions your orthodontist and staff members give you.

How to Brush?

1. Use fluoride toothpaste and a soft, rounded bristle toothbrush that is in good condition. Because braces wear out a toothbrush quickly, replace your brush as soon as it shows signs of wear.
2. Brush around all the parts of your braces and every surface of your teeth (fronts, sides and backs.) Be sure to brush your tongue and the roof of your mouth. A good way to tell if you're brushing correctly is if your braces look clean and shiny and you can see the edges of the brackets clearly.
3. Brush your gums gently and thoroughly.
4. Rinse thoroughly after brushing.
5. Inspect your teeth and braces carefully to make sure they are spotless. Look closely in a well-lit mirror. This is a good time to check for loose or broken brackets. If you find a problem, contact the orthodontist's office to see if it needs to be checked and if time needs to be scheduled to make a repair.

How to Floss?

- Floss every night before you go to bed. That way, you won't feel rushed.
- When flossing with braces on, it might be necessary to use what's called a floss threader. This reusable tool allows you to get dental floss underneath your archwire easily.
- Make sure you clean carefully along and under the gum lines.
- Flossing with braces may seem like a difficult process, but it's very important. As with anything, a little practice will make it go a lot faster.

Other Hygiene Helpers

Your orthodontist or dentist may recommend one or more of these aids to help keep your teeth clean:

Interproximal Brush

This tool slips under your archwire to more completely remove plaque and food particles near your brackets.

Power Toothbrush or Water Irrigator

These devices, such as the Sonicare toothbrush, are designed to make brushing easier and more efficient.

Prescription Fluoride Toothpaste or Fluoride Rinse

If prescribed by your orthodontist, use once a day as part of your cleaning routine. For the best results, use with your interproximal brush to deliver maximum fluoride protection to your teeth.

The Problems That Poor Oral Hygiene Can Cause

Good dental hygiene is critical during orthodontic treatment. Without it, plaque and food can accumulate around your braces. The bacteria in plaque react with sugars and starches in food and form an acid that can eat away the enamel on your teeth, leading to white marks, cavities or gum disease.

1. If plaque accumulates around your braces, it can leave permanent stains on your teeth called **decalcification**. Lines and spots from decalcification will remain on your teeth for life.
2. Periodontal disease, caused by the build-up of plaque, occurs in three stages. In the first stage, plaque accumulation irritates the gums. Your gums may be puffy or swollen. They may bleed when you brush or floss. This is called **gingivitis**.
3. Over time, the build-up of plaque may harden into a substance called tartar. As tartar accumulates, gaps or pockets may form between your gums and teeth. Even more tartar can collect in these pockets. This is called **periodontitis**.
4. Pockets of bacteria form and deepen beneath your gums, attacking and destroying the bone that anchor your teeth. This can even cause healthy teeth to loosen or eventually fall out. This is called **advanced periodontitis**. Early gum disease is reversible with professional help and good home care, but if it's ignored, it can get worse. Gum disease is usually painless, so you need to pay attention to signs like bleeding or swollen and puffy gums. Carefully follow your orthodontist's directions on hygiene to avoid these problems.

Plaque is the Enemy

Plaque is a sticky, colorless film that collects on your teeth. It's composed of bacteria, food and saliva. If plaque and trapped food are left on your teeth and around your braces, they can cause swollen gums, bad breath, cavities and permanent marks on your teeth.

When to Clean?

Brush thoroughly after each time you have a meal or a snack. If you can't brush right away, be sure to at least rinse your mouth well with water until you can brush. Carry a travel toothbrush so that you can brush when away from home. At least once every day, brush your teeth and braces thoroughly until they are spotlessly clean, and then floss. This takes a little extra time, so you may want to do it at night before going to bed.