



Advice On Wearing An Orthodontic Appliance

When teeth come through crooked or crowded, a dentist may recommend orthodontic treatment to straighten or move them. This is important, not just for looks, but also because having straight teeth enables you to clean them thoroughly and to talk and chew food more easily.

Most orthodontic work is carried out on children, but increasingly, adults, concerned about the look of their teeth are having orthodontic work carried out.

What Does Orthodontic Work Involve?

Your dentist will probably refer you to a specialist orthodontist, who will assess your mouth and advise you on the best treatment plan to improve the appearance of your teeth. Often this will involve the removal of some good teeth, to make room for others to be straightened.

What Kind Of Appliances Are There?

Usually known as braces, these appliances slowly and gently move your teeth into line. There are many types and designs, but broadly they can be either:

- * Removable, which can be taken out for cleaning or
- * Fixed, which can only be removed by the orthodontist at the end of the treatment

Plastic or ceramic brackets are now available, which look more attractive than metal ones, but are subject to technical limitations. At the end of the treatment, retainers are usually worn for a considerable time to allow the teeth to stabilise.

How Long Does The Treatment Take?

Depending on the complexity of the case, and how much the teeth need to be moved, the appliance will be used for several months, and maybe for as long as 2 years, with regular returns to the orthodontist for adjustment. It will probably feel slightly uncomfortable for a while, but this should settle. If you continue to feel discomfort, ask for your orthodontist's advice.

What Do I Need To Do During Treatment?

Oral hygiene is particularly important while you are wearing an orthodontic appliance, as it is easy for food and debris to get lodged, and for plaque to build up, leading to decay and gum problems. Your orthodontist and hygienist will be able to demonstrate cleaning techniques and advise you on any special requirements.

Oral Hygiene

This may take as much as 3 times longer than normal. Clean after every meal, trying to cover all sides of your teeth and the fixed appliance if worn. Clean systematically around each tooth, using a fluoride toothpaste and soft to medium brush.

Disclosing tablets can be helpful in showing you where plaque is building up, for example in hard-to-reach areas.

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Toothbrushes with shortened central tufts are good for cleaning fixed appliances, while your hygienist or orthodontist may recommend specialist interspace brushes or an interdental bottlebrush to get the debris and plaque out from under the wires. A fluoride rinse is often recommended. It gives daily protection and strengthens tooth enamel.

Electric brushes may be used while the orthodontic appliance is in place. Remember, that no matter what specialist cleaning tools you have, thorough cleaning is the most important factor.

Cleaning A Removable Appliance

This should be done thoroughly each day with a soft toothbrush and your normal toothpaste.

Clean the appliance over a sink of water or a soft surface, so that it will not be broken if dropped. Sonic cleaners are also available, which can be very effective.

What Can I Eat?

Cut up foods rather than crunching on them. Very hard foods, like certain sweets, may damage the delicate appliance. Sugary foods and drinks should be avoided as far as possible. If sticky, they will adhere to the appliance, encouraging decay and may even pull out the components. Fizzy drinks may also lead to erosion of the enamel covering the teeth. Try to snack on non-sugary foods and, if toothbrushing cannot be carried out during the day, rinse the mouth out well with water after meals to wash out any food lodged there.