



## Protecting Your Orthodontic Investment

You are the person in charge of keeping your teeth straight. How do you do this? By wearing your retainers. Retainers are used for two reasons: first, to allow bone to rebuild after your teeth have moved, and second, to keep individual teeth from drifting. In other words, retainers preserve and stabilize the results you and your orthodontist achieved through your orthodontic treatment.

### Long-term Expectations

The fact is that throughout your lifetime, even though you have had orthodontic treatment, you can expect changes in tooth position. Many factors at work may cause teeth to shift. Such changes vary from individual to individual and most of the time they are hardly noticeable. But on occasion changes occur that are disappointing to both the patient and the orthodontist. Changes in tooth position are not a failure of your orthodontic treatment but are a natural process. We expect changes in our bodies as we grow older, and teeth are no exception. To help control and limit these changes, retainers are prescribed after your braces are removed.

### Common Relapse Problems



The American Association of Orthodontists thanks you for placing your confidence in your orthodontic specialist. If you have any questions or concerns throughout your treatment or in the future, please consult your orthodontic specialist or visit [mylifemysmile.org](http://mylifemysmile.org).

Orthodontic specialists receive an additional two to three years of specialized education beyond dental school to learn the proper way to align and straighten teeth. Only those who successfully complete this formal education may call themselves "orthodontic specialists," and only orthodontic specialists can be members of the American Association of Orthodontists.

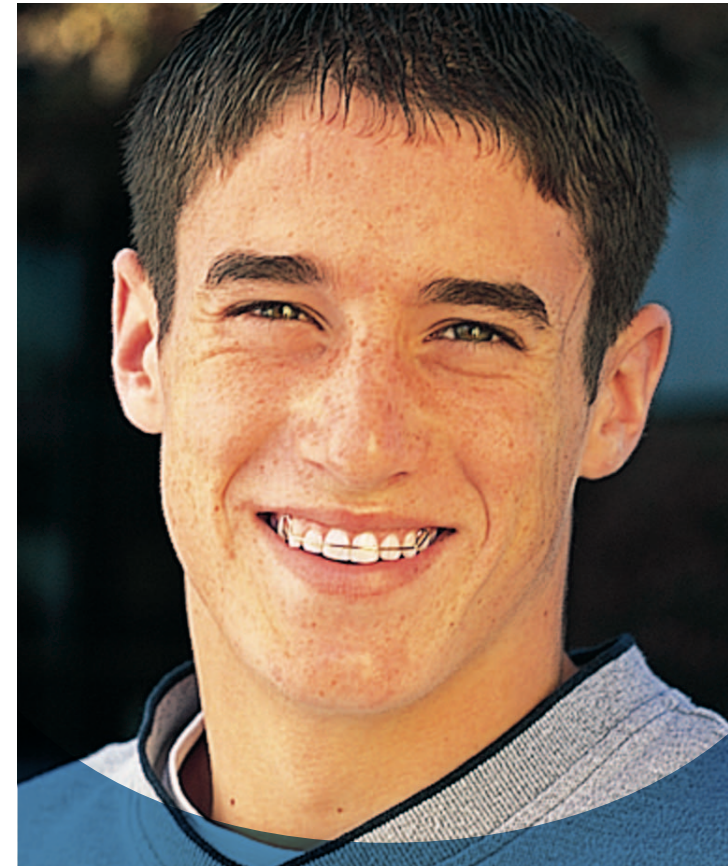


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# Keeping Your Smile Beautiful

After orthodontic treatment



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# Questions and Answers

## How long do I have to wear retainers?

Your orthodontist will recommend how long to continue wearing your retainers, whether they are removable (the kind you put in and take out) or fixed (bonded behind your teeth). Wearing your retainers as prescribed is the best way to keep your teeth from moving after your orthodontic treatment. There are many reasons teeth may move following orthodontic treatment. Teeth are not set in concrete, they are in bone. And because bone around your teeth is continually changing (breaking down and rebuilding), your teeth may shift after your braces are removed. By wearing your retainers, your teeth are more likely to remain where your orthodontist has placed them.

## What kinds of retainers can I choose from?

There are many types and designs of both upper and lower retainers. Your orthodontist has prescribed custom retainers that are best for you. But retainers can only do their jobs if you do yours by wearing them as instructed by your orthodontist.



# Dental hygiene is extremely important to your overall dental health



## Why do some teeth shift?

The small changes that occur after braces are removed are due to a “settling in” as you use your teeth for biting and chewing. The more serious and undesirable changes may be traced to genetics or later-than-normal growth, which is unpredictable. Movement is most common in lower front teeth. This is particularly true if the teeth were extremely crowded prior to treatment. Changes in tooth position are a lifelong and naturally occurring phenomenon. The best way to keep teeth from shifting is to wear your retainers as prescribed. If you notice movement after your braces are removed, please contact your orthodontist.

## Can retainers be worn too long?

No. Retainers stabilize and preserve the alignment of teeth and jaws that orthodontic treatment achieved. Many people wear removable retainers nightly for the rest of their lives. Ask your orthodontist for guidance about your long-term retainer wear.

## I had orthodontic treatment as a teen, and now as an adult my teeth are out of place. What can I do?

If you notice an unwanted change in your smile or bite, contact your orthodontist for information. An orthodontic “tune up” may be necessary to regain proper alignment.

## Will wisdom teeth cause teeth to shift?

Research suggests that wisdom teeth do not necessarily cause teeth to shift. In most cases, removal of wisdom teeth is done for general dental health reasons rather than for orthodontic health. Your family dentist or your orthodontist can give you guidance regarding removal of wisdom teeth.

## Important Facts to Remember

- Keeping your teeth straight is now your responsibility.
- Do not be alarmed if small changes occur.
- Wearing your retainer long-term as prescribed by your orthodontist is the best way to preserve the healthy, beautiful smile created by your orthodontic treatment.
- Contact your orthodontist any time you need advice or have concerns.
- See your family dentist regularly.

Achieving your healthy, beautiful smile has been a team effort involving you, your orthodontist, your dentist and other dental specialists, as needed. Because dental hygiene is so important to your good dental health, be sure to continue to visit your family dentist regularly and brush and floss as instructed by your dentist.