

Orthodontic Retention



When you decide to pursue treatment for your family's orthodontic needs, there are many different phases of treatment to consider. In addition to the active phases of tooth movement, it is just as important to consider the retentive phase of treatment.

Certain factors and each individual orthodontic problem can influence the decision of the type and duration of retention. The reasons for this tooth movement or relapse may be multifactorial and may occur at any time throughout one's life. To help prevent the teeth from shifting after orthodontic treatment, the orthodontist may advise some sort of retention. He or she usually makes the decision about the type and duration of retention at the time of the treatment initiation.

Retention is the holding of teeth in optimum esthetic and functional positions. However, certain degrees of tooth movement are expected as we age due to normal wear from attrition and adverse occlusal (biting) forces such as in cases of grinding or clenching of teeth. Other factors such as the development and eruption of third molars (wisdom teeth) may cause teeth to shift whether orthodontic treatment was provided or not. The goal of retention is to hold the teeth in their optimum esthetic and functional position throughout life.

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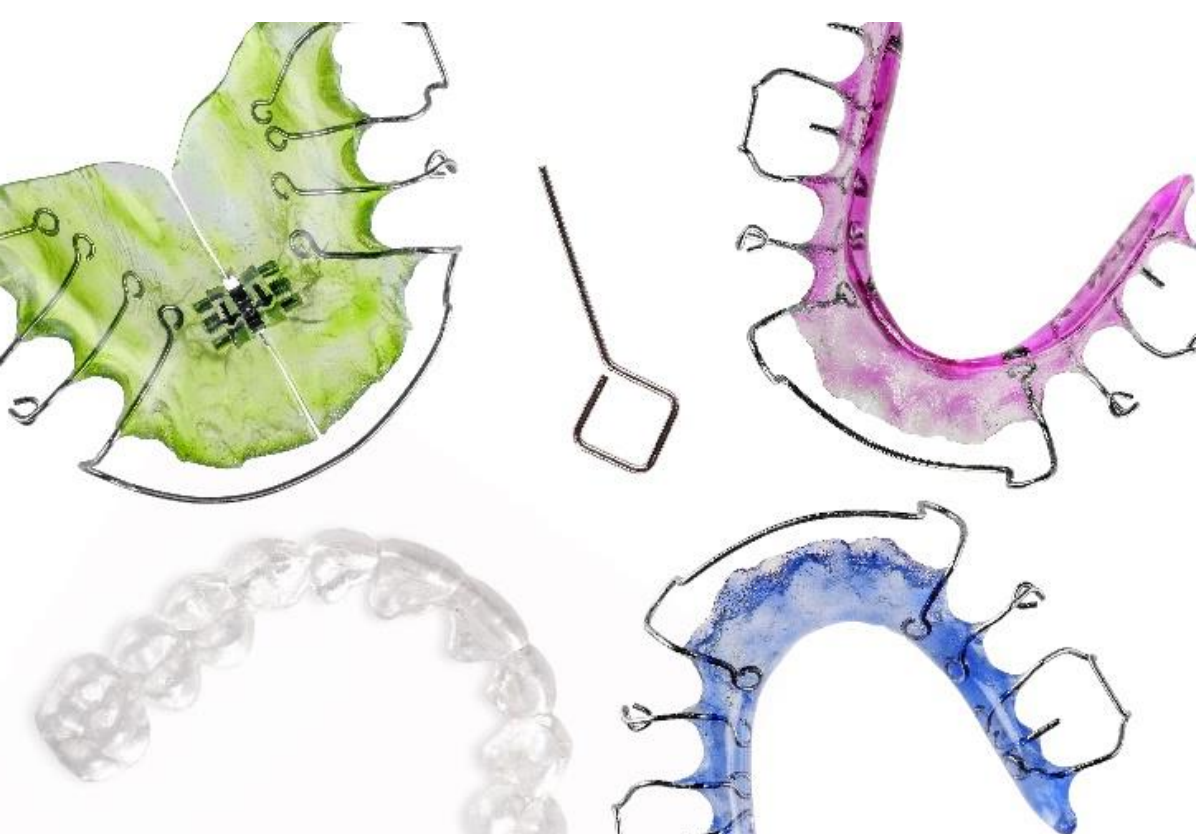
The discussion of retention usually takes place at the initial consultation or during the treatment recommendations appointment. The orthodontist usually determines the type and duration of retention based on a number of factors he or she considers after a clinical examination and review of a patient's diagnostic records.

Each case is different, and the orthodontist may recommend several options for post-treatment retention. Certain factors such as amount of tooth movement, duration of treatment, and the overall severity of the case can have an impact on the retention of teeth in their new position.



The orthodontist, in addition to recommending retainers, will apply timeproven techniques to help in the retention of the teeth. One process is overcorrection of tooth position temporarily during treatment. Another process is interproximal reduction, where the orthodontist slightly flattens the contacts between the teeth to create room and provide a larger surface area of contact between teeth. This helps prevent shifting. In some cases, the orthodontist will refer a patient for a surgical procedure that helps relieve the tension of stretched elastic collagen fibers that may be pulling the teeth back into position.

Wearing a retainer is simple and a significant part of orthodontic treatment. It is vital that the patient wear the retainer in the way that the orthodontist advises.



There are many different retainers available, and the orthodontist will recommend the type of retainer that will best keep each patient's teeth in position. Here is an outline of the different types of retainers the orthodontist may recommend:

- Hawley Removable Retainer – This is the most common retainer and is made of a metal wire that surrounds the teeth, keeping them in place. The wire is rooted to a piece of specially molded acrylic, which resides in the palate or floor of the mouth.

- Essix Removable Retainer – This is a clear or transparent retainer that is molded to fit over the teeth.
- Bonded Fixed Retainer – This is a wire bonded to the tongue-side of the teeth. It is designed to hold the teeth in a particular position for a long period of time. This type of retainer may be used in conjunction with the above removable retainers. The length of time this type of retainer is used can also vary depending on each individual case. Other factors such as hygiene and periodic maintenance should also be considered when using this type of retainer. One of the more significant benefits of this type of retainer is decreased need for compliance since the retainer is bonded directly to the teeth.

The orthodontist specially designs each patient's retainer to help maintain treatment results. In order to benefit from a lifelong healthy straight smile, it is essential that patients follow these guidelines for wearing and taking care of a retainer:

- Wear the retainer as directed–Otherwise, it will not be effective in preventing the teeth from moving back into their original position.
- Keep it clean–The orthodontist will show how to best keep each particular retainer clean, and this must be done regularly (especially during times of illness). Many different disinfecting solutions are compatible with removable retainers. Patients must also make sure to see their dentist for a thorough cleaning every 6 months or more often, if recommended, especially with bonded fixed retainers.
- Handle the retainers with care–It is very easy to lose or damage a retainer. If it is not in the mouth, it should be in its case. Retainers can be very expensive to replace.
- Call the orthodontist about any problems–If a retainer is lost or broken, contact the orthodontist immediately for a replacement. If it stops fitting properly (which is liable to happen if the patient doesn't wear it as instructed) or if a fixed retainer becomes loose, call the orthodontist right away for an appointment.

