

# RETAINERS

## WHAT TO EXPECT

by Lisa Grant, DDS

Hearing that you may need to wear a retainer may seem like a scary thing at first. But that's probably because you are not all that familiar with what they are and what they do. Once you take the mystery out of retainers, it is clear to see that they are a simple device that helps to maintain or improve your bite, as well as sometimes address other conditions. And, they are nothing to be afraid of!

### What They Are

You may have seen people wearing a retainer before, but they are not all that noticeable. A retainer is a small device that is made out of clear plastic, rubber, or even metal. They are custom-made so that they only fit your teeth. They are part of a treatment plan that has likely been determined by an orthodontist.

Using retainers to help align teeth is a common option. The length of time that someone has to wear them varies, but they are especially common following someone having their braces removed. During the process of wearing braces, the teeth have been moved into the desired position, but they are not yet settled into the gum and jaw. By using a retainer, it helps to further set your teeth in their new position. Teeth tend to shift, so the retainer can help keep them where they are supposed to be until they are settled in and will not shift out of place.

### Reasons for Wearing

Wearing a retainer after having braces removed is just one of the ways retainers are used. During this route, the retainer is typically worn each day for a period of six months, then the person will wear it to bed at night for a while. This effort just helps to ensure that the new tooth placement is retained. There are other conditions that call for a retainer as part of corrective treatment as well. Some of those conditions include: closing any gaps that might be in the bite, to help correct speech problems, or a variety of medical conditions, including tongue thrust, where the tongue goes between the teeth when talking.

*Clear aligners have become a very popular type of retainer in recent years. Invisalign's Vivera retainer system offers four replacement aligners throughout your retention program at no additional charge.*





Retainers can also be used to address bruxism, which is the grinding of the teeth while sleeping.

There are a variety of conditions that may call for a treatment plan that requires a retainer. Working with an orthodontist is the best way to determine if one can help with a particular condition and how long one would have to be worn, as the time varies depending on the severity of the problem being treated.

#### **Preparing for a Retainer**

When a retainer is being recommended as part of someone's treatment plan, it helps to know what to expect, such as a mold being made of your teeth. This is done through a process of using a thick liquid, called alginate, which makes a temporary mold of the teeth. That temporary mold is then used to make the retainer.

Retainers today have come a long way from the bigger pure metal ones of decades past. They can be customized to show your personality, including having colors and pictures on them, or they can be clear plastic so that they are less noticeable to others. Depending on who is getting the retainer and their age, there are many options to consider.

#### **Length, Care and Beyond**

The length of time you can expect to wear your retainer varies. Much depends on the reason and severity of the treatment you are receiving. You can expect to meet with the orthodontist periodically, in order to make sure that everything is going according to the treatment plan and there is no discomfort.

Caring for a retainer is simple because they can easily be removed. It is recommended that they are cleaned daily, in order to maintain good oral hygiene and get rid of plaque and food particles. How the retainer is cleaned depends upon the type that you have, so you will need to check with the orthodontist for the cleaning recommendations on your specific version.

Retainers are part of a treatment plan that may be addressing the misalignment of the teeth, close gaps in the bite, correct speech problems, and even assist in medical conditions. Retainers are a simple device that can do an important job. Whether helping to get teeth settled in after braces, to align teeth, or to correct another condition, they are a treatment option that helps people to feel confident, as well as more comfortable.