

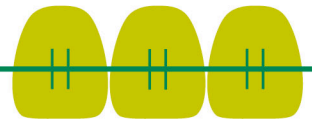
## RETAINERS

When the active tooth movement is complete, the teeth need a period of retention to support them in their new positions, until they have “settled”. **The teeth have a “memory” for where they used to be and, if given the opportunity, will tend to return to their original place. This is why retainers are so important.**

Straightening the teeth is only part of the battle, supporting the teeth in their new positions is just as important. If the retainers do not hold the teeth in position, they can quickly move or relapse, undoing all the previous hard work. This can happen very quickly after the brace is removed.

It will take you a few days to get used to the retainers. There are 3 basic types:

1. The “gum-shield” type is made in the same way as a gum-shield for sport. It is different material, thinner, more rigid and almost transparent. It may initially affect your speech and make your mouth water. These problems will disappear as you get used to it. This type of retainer should be taken out for eating, cleaning and contact sports. **If broken or distorted, it cannot be mended, but if a bit irritates, it can be trimmed with a pair of sharp scissors. The retainer is moulded by heat and pressure, do not clean it in hot water – it will warp.**
2. The “fixed” retainer is glued in, usually behind the front teeth to support them. It is small, neat and very well tolerated, but it is not indestructible. Like a fixed brace, if the retainer is bitten on hard, it can break. A fixed retainer can be left in place for a long time if necessary. **If it is “knocked off” but undamaged, it can be re-glued; if bent or broken, it must be replaced.**
3. The “removable” retainer is similar to a removable brace, but only supports, not moves the teeth. It will initially affect the speech and make the mouth water, but this subsides as the mouth gets used to the appliance.



It is important to follow your orthodontist's instructions about wearing the retainers. The usual plan for a removable retainer is to wear it FULL TIME for the first 3 or 4 months. After that a similar period of EVENING AND NIGHT wear is required, then a period of NIGHT ONLY wear. There is no set period for retainer wear, it varies from person to person and can be from 9-18 months (or more).

A gum-shield type retainer should only be removed for eating, cleaning and contact sports.

A removable retainer can be removed for cleaning and contact sports.

A fixed retainer cannot be removed without serious risk of damage.

The NHS will provide ONE retainer. **If a retainer is lost, distorted or broken beyond repair, there is a statutory charge (set by the Department of Health) for the replacement.** This charge is currently £59.40 (2009/2010) per retainer and must be paid before the replacement can be made. The replacement is reported to the Health Authority who MAY contact you and MAY refund part or all of the charge.

It is a very good idea to have a small box to put your removable retainer into. If the appliance goes straight from the mouth to the box, it is safe. In the pocket, it can be trodden on, sat on, eaten by the dog, cleared away in McDonalds (yes – they've all happened). Suitable boxes are available at Reception and in any good chemists.

**Replacement retainers are expensive – please look after them.**

The retainers must be kept clean. If food and debris are allowed to build up around the retainer, the teeth and gums will be damaged. The retainer should be cleaned at least twice a day with toothbrush and toothpaste. There are also special tablets for cleaning retainers, like "Steradent" is for dentures. These tablets are "Retainer Brite" and "Brace Mate". There are designed to work over a period of about 20 minutes (unlike "Steradent" which works over 8 hours). A possible alternative is Milton's solution – the stuff used on babies' bottles.

**IF IN DOUBT, ASK YOUR ORTHDONTIST OR YOUR DENTIST**

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