



## RETAINERS

**Everyone will require retainers after their braces are removed.** There are no exceptions to this rule. There are a variety of retainers that we use to help stabilize teeth once the braces have been removed. Those retainers are chosen based on a variety of factors, each unique to the individual patient. So, trying to compare retainers from patient to patient is like comparing apples to oranges. When we know that we are getting close to brace removal, I start thinking about the patient's retention needs. Sometimes, those retainers are already part of the patient's treatment plan, but over a two year period of treatment, one never knows what new forms of retention might be developed before the patient has their braces removed. So, most often, I am deciding a few visits before the braces come off.

As discussed in a prior letter on relapse, everyone requires retainers. They will need retainers for both the upper and lower teeth. I can guarantee you that the teeth will move if the retainers are not worn. I can also guarantee you that you will not be happy if this occurs. Unfortunately, the long-term outcome is totally dependent upon the patient wearing the retainers. The amount of shifting that can occur will decrease as time goes on, so the longer you are out of braces, the smaller the relapse.

There are a few types of retainers to choose from for our patients. For the top teeth, if there was a space between the two front teeth, we typically glue a wire behind them to keep the space closed. This wire should remain for a minimum of one year, but the longer the better. It is still accompanied by a removable retainer that the patient will wear full time for 2 months, half time for one year, and sleeping only for two additional years. After the first three years, they can wear the retainer a few nights a week.

The two upper retainers are either the more traditional Hawley retainer with a metal wire. This is the strongest of the retainers and the one that will last a lifetime if the patient cares for it properly. The other retainer is a clear retainer that completely covers the teeth. It can be made in a variety of thicknesses, but because it covers the chewing surface of the teeth, it will eventually develop holes and will need to be replaced anywhere from every six months to every two years. Sometimes, for a small upcharge, we can make the clear one for the patient to wear during the day and the wire retainer to be worn at night. This can increase the likelihood of the retainers being worn full-time for the first 2 months.

Most of the time, with some exceptions, I recommend a permanent retainer for the lower arch. This is a wire that is glued behind the lower front teeth to hold them in place. These teeth have the highest relapse potential and are most likely to shift almost immediately if a retainer is not worn properly. Since retainers must be worn for a lifetime, we hope that this wire will stay around for a minimum of 3 years, and possibly a lifetime. On occasion, it may have to be reinforced. If removed, it will have to be replaced with another retainer.



Clear Retainers



Hawley Retainers



Bonded Fixed Retainer