

# You Play a Key Role in Your Treatment

## How to Brush?

- + Use a fluoride toothpaste and a soft, rounded-bristle toothbrush that's in good condition. Because braces wear out a toothbrush quickly, replace your brush as soon as it shows signs of wear.
- + Brush around all the parts of your braces and every surface of your teeth — fronts, sides and backs. Be sure to brush your tongue and roof of the mouth.

A good way to tell if you're brushing correctly is if your braces look clean and shiny and you can see the edges of the brackets clearly.
- + Brush your gums gently and thoroughly.
- + Rinse thoroughly after brushing.
- + Inspect your teeth and braces carefully to make sure they are spotless. Look closely in a well-lighted mirror. This is a good time to check for loose or broken brackets. If you find a problem, contact the orthodontist's office to see if it needs to be checked out and if time needs to be scheduled to make a repair.

## How to Floss?

- + Floss every night before you go to bed. That way, you won't feel rushed.
- + When flossing with braces on, it might be necessary to use what's called a floss threader. This reusable tool allows you to get dental floss underneath your archwire easily.
- + Make sure you clean carefully along and under the gumlines.
- + Flossing with braces on may seem like a difficult process, but it's very important. And as with anything, a little practice will make it go a lot faster.

## Other Hygiene Helpers

Your orthodontist or dentist may recommend one or more of these aids to help keep your teeth clean:

### INTERPROXIMAL BRUSH

This tool slips under your archwire to more completely remove plaque and food particles near your brackets.



### PRESCRIPTION FLUORIDE TOOTHPASTE OR FLUORIDE RINSE

Use once a day as part of your cleaning routine, if prescribed by your orthodontist. For the best results, use with your interproximal brush to deliver maximum fluoride protection to your teeth.

### POWER TOOTHBRUSH OR WATER IRRIGATOR

These devices, such as the Sonicare toothbrush, are designed to make brushing easier and more efficient.



**Ask your orthodontist about these and other new products and techniques available to you.**

# The Problems That Poor Oral Hygiene Can Cause

Good dental hygiene is critical during orthodontic treatment. Without it, plaque and food can accumulate around your braces, between teeth and at the gumline. The bacteria in plaque react with sugars and starches in food and form an acid that can eat away at the enamel on your teeth, leading to permanent white marks, cavities or gum disease, a bacterial infection.

- 1 If plaque, a sticky, colorless film, accumulates around your braces, it can leave permanent white stains on your teeth called **decalcification**. Lines and spots from decalcification will remain on your teeth for life.
- 2 **Gingivitis** is the earliest stage of gum disease. Plaque irritates the gums. Gums may be red, puffy or swollen and may bleed when you brush or floss.
- 3 In **advanced gingivitis**, the gums fill with fluid and may bleed easily. The color of the gum tissue loses the healthy pink color as the bacterial infection takes hold.
- 4 Over time, built up plaque may harden into a substance called tartar. As tartar accumulates, gaps or pockets may form between your gums and teeth. That can let even more tartar collect in these pockets. This is called **periodontitis**. Untreated, periodontitis can destroy the bone that anchors your teeth. More teeth are lost because of gum disease than because of cavities.

Early gum disease is reversible with professional help and good home care, but if it's ignored it can get worse. Gum disease is usually painless, so you need to pay attention to signs like bleeding, or swollen and puffy gums. Carefully follow your orthodontist's directions on hygiene to avoid these problems.

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