

# RETAINERS - WHAT TO EXPECT

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Hearing that you will need to wear a retainer may make you a little anxious at first. But that's probably because you are not 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 your smile. Maybe they should be called maintainers?

After the process of wearing braces or invisalign, the teeth have been moved into the desired position, but they are not yet settled into the bones and gums. 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.

## WHAT THEY ARE

There are several different types of retainers – fixed (or bonded) and removable. Removable retainers are the more common of the two types. Of the removable retainers, the two most common types are an Essix (clear) retainer and a Hawley retainer. A clear retainer is a thin retainer made out of clear plastic – some people often call them an Invisalign retainer because they resemble Invisalign aligners. You may have seen people wearing them before, but they are not all that noticeable. They are custom-made so that they only fit your teeth. A Hawley retainer is a little bigger and bulkier than a clear retainer and is not as comfortable. These retainers can come in different colors and have a metal wire that ends up on the front of your teeth. Of these two retainers, the Essix or clear retainer is more esthetic, more comfortable, and more efficient at keeping your teeth straight.

*Example of a Hawley Retainer*



## BONDED RETAINERS

Bonded retainers can be placed on the back of the upper front teeth or behind the lower front teeth. A lot of people like the bonded retainers, but they have disadvantages. Flossing is more difficult and takes more time with a bonded retainer. Given the fact that most people do not floss enough now, bonded retainers should only be used in people who have displayed excellent oral hygiene during orthodontic treatment. Bonded retainers can provide a false sense of security because they can sometimes break unbeknownst to patients, and the teeth may shift.



*Example of an Essix Retainer*

## HOW LONG TO WEAR A RETAINER

You see, there is no part of your body that is not going to change in your lifetime. As you get older, your hair will turn grey, your eyesight diminishes, your skin wrinkles, your metabolism slows, etc. Another lifetime guarantee is that without retainers, your teeth are going to move. Depressing isn't it?

Now consider this scenario: What if we gave you a magic belt. This magic belt guarantees you would not gain any weight as long as you wear it every day. Would you wear that belt every day? Dr. Caggiano would! Bad news - that magic belt doesn't exist. Good news - retainers are magic belts, but for your teeth!

Once you are done with your orthodontic treatment, you enter the retainer phase of treatment. Dr. Caggiano will typically recommend that you wear your retainer 24/7 for one month (only removing them to eat and brush your teeth), then only at nighttime after that. In fact, given what we taught you above, if you want to make sure your teeth won't move your entire life, wear your retainers nighttime for a lifetime. Now, don't panic – some people may not be able to do that. Dr. Caggiano will give you some practical and easy to follow advice at your last retainer visit included with your treatment.

## PREPARING FOR A RETAINER

When a retainer is being recommended as part of someone's treatment plan, it helps to know what to expect. When you are ready for a retainer, a mold will be taken of your teeth. This is done through a process of using a thick liquid, called alginate, which makes a mold of your teeth. That mold is then used to make a stone model of your teeth, which the retainer is made on. Unfortunately, the stone model gets destroyed in

## Example of a Bonded Retainer



the retainer fabrication process. So if you ever need a new retainer (because you lose it, or your dog eats it) we will need to take a new mold.

## CARE AND BEYOND

Be careful not lose your retainer. If you do, it will require a couple of visits to our office to make you a new one, not to mention an additional cost for the replacement retainer. Also, dogs and other pets love to chew on the retainers (they become very expensive dog toys), so be sure to keep them out of reach from your dogs.

Caring for a retainer is simple because they can easily be removed. It is recommended that they are cleaned daily with just a toothbrush and water, in order to maintain good oral hygiene and get rid of plaque and food particles. Some retainers may benefit from an occasional use of a retainer cleaner or denture cleaner that you can find in your local pharmacy. Others may want to try soaking and then brushing the retainer in equal parts of white vinegar and water to dissolve the mineral deposits that may accumulate if the retainer is not kept clean daily.

Although everyone is different, your retainer should last you a very long time. Some in fact may last a lifetime!