

Oral health advice for patients with fixed braces

How do I clean my teeth when I have fixed braces on?

You will need to brush your teeth 3 times a day, at least one hour after meal times and before you go to bed at night.

Every time you clean your teeth you should:

- ✓ Use a medium size and texture toothbrush.
- ✓ Use a pea sized amount of toothpaste that contains fluoride.
- ✓ Always look in the mirror when brushing your teeth.
- ✓ Always use small circular movements (the bristles of the brush should point towards the gums).
- ✓ Make sure that you brush above your brace, on the brace and below the brace. Don't forget to brush all of the other surfaces of your teeth and brush your gums gently!
- ✓ Use your small interdental brushes to clean in between and around every bracket while you still have toothpaste in your mouth (the brackets are the small squares that are on each of your teeth). You should use these brushes every time you brush. Always point these brushes in the opposite direction from your gums to avoid injury.

Why do I need to brush my teeth?

Cleaning your teeth is very important, especially when you have braces on. You will need to put in extra time and effort to avoid permanent damage to your teeth when your braces are taken off.

Brushing your teeth and gums daily is important because a good brushing technique will remove plaque. Plaque is a white/yellow thin and sticky layer of bacteria that constantly forms on all surfaces of our teeth and gums. Bacteria in our mouths combine with saliva and small food particles to form plaque. If the plaque isn't removed it continues to build up in layers and feeds on the food debris that hasn't been cleaned away. This can cause tooth decay and gum related diseases.

What is tooth decay?

Tooth decay is also known as dental caries. It is caused by plaque acids which have not been removed. These slowly dissolve the outer surface of the teeth (enamel).

Tooth decay damages the teeth by causing small (usually dark) holes, which will grow in size if left untreated. If you notice any tooth decay you should contact your dentist as soon as possible.

Another way to try and reduce the possibility of tooth decay is to avoid/limit fizzy drinks, fruit juices and other sugary food and drinks. These often contain a high amount of sugar and acid which together can cause erosion and tooth decay. Milk and water are the safest drinks to have to protect your teeth.

Why should I use a toothpaste and mouthwash containing fluoride?

Fluoride is believed to help your dental health by reducing the amount of acid that is produced in your mouth by bacteria. It also strengthens the tooth enamel against tooth decay. Fluoride is a naturally made mineral which can be found in water and some foods. These days it is in most oral health products.

You should use toothpaste with a fluoride level of 1,350-1,500ppm (parts per million.) The level of fluoride can be found on the pack. We also advise using an alcohol free mouthwash containing fluoride at a different time to brushing, for example, when you get home from school/college or work. This will add more fluoride to your teeth to help against tooth decay. Using a mouthwash does NOT replace brushing your teeth!

What are disclosing tablets?

Disclosing tablets are small, coloured chewable tablets that contain harmless dye. When chewed, the dye will stick to the plaque which remains on the teeth and gums, highlighting the areas that are being missed. The plaque is then removed by simply brushing the stained areas thoroughly.

We recommend using these tablets once a week to help you see how you are doing with your brushing and to make sure that you are not missing anywhere.

It would be a good idea to use Vaseline or something similar on your lips before using the tablets as they can stain your lips! Be sure not to swallow the tablet and always follow the instructions on the packet.

Should I still see my dentist when I have braces?

Yes, it is very important to keep seeing your dentist regularly. Although you are coming to see us for your brace adjustments, it is still essential that your dentist checks on your general dental health.

How often should I change my toothbrush?

You should change your toothbrush approximately every 2-3 months or earlier if the bristles are frayed. If you do not change your toothbrush regularly, it may become less effective.

Top tips for looking after your teeth

- ✓ carry a spare toothbrush around with you when you are away from home so that you can clean after meals
- ✓ when brushing, pay extra attention to where your tooth meets the gum as this part of the mouth is often forgotten
- ✓ your gums should be light pink in colour and not swollen or bright red
- ✓ always ask your orthodontist or nurse for any advice on cleaning as they will be happy to help you (it is a good idea to bring your toothbrush to your appointments)
- ✓ limit your sugary/acidic food and drinks to mealtimes
- ✓ wait at least one hour after eating or drinking before brushing your teeth - every time you eat or drink anything sugary, your teeth are under acid attack for an hour, and brushing straight after could cause erosion damage

Contact details

Orthodontic Department
Tel: 01342 414419 or 414304

Please ask if you would like this leaflet in large print or an alternative format.