

CENTURY ORTHODONTICS

OUR THIRD CENTURY OF ORTHODONTIC EXCELLENCE

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IS THERE LIFE AFTER RETAINERS?

Q. When am I finished?

A. *Never...Now don't panic. This doesn't mean you have to come in every year for the rest of your life. But as we orthodontists often say: "teeth are not set in concrete". No matter how many months or years they are held in place the bone around them never gets so hard that they can't move. In fact, like any other organ of your body, the teeth (and their alignment) constantly change as you grow older. Even people who had "perfect" teeth (lucky!) when they were young, often find their teeth moving slightly as they age.*

Q. So what good were braces?

A. *The secret of a good orthodontic result is to put the teeth in the most esthetic, functional, and stable position that is possible considering each individual's dental problems and facial structure. Sometimes this means extracting permanent teeth to better balance the size of the teeth and the size of the mouth. Nonextraction treatment, no matter how much we all would prefer to avoid removal of permanent teeth, is often not nearly as stable. Because of the many factors involved (skeletal disharmony, poor muscular patterns, abnormal tooth size, limits of patient cooperation, etc.) the best final position may not be as stable as we would like. Nevertheless a "D" set of teeth improved up to an "A" that slips to a "B" is far better than an untreated "D" that slips to an "F".*

After a few years in retainers, the tooth arrangement should be reasonably stable; although corrected dental and skeletal problems all have varying tendencies to "rebound". Some, like crossbites and crowding treated with extractions, are usually very stable; others, especially crooked lower front teeth without extractions, are especially unstable. Like people who always have to be on a diet or wear glasses to correct a vision problem, some teeth need retention forever.

Over please

Q. So when can I stop wearing my retainer(s)?

A. *No one can guarantee your teeth will always remain as perfect as the day the braces came off. Retainers, however, can be like an insurance policy. We don't know for sure if the teeth will move, but it is easier to keep them straight than to restraighten them after they have shifted. Realistically most people at some point stop wearing, or lose or break their retainers and go free. They are willing to sacrifice some degree of their original correction for the freedom to do without any retainers at all. It is unlikely your teeth will ever return to their original alignment, although the more minor the initial problem the less relapse that can be tolerated. Grade "D"'s improved to "A's" that relapse to "B"'s are usually fine, but a "B" taken to an "A" can not afford to slip back much at all before its back to where it started.*

Q. If I decide not to wear my retainer..., should I still see you?

A. *After approximately two years of retainer wear we enter into the post-retention period. Visits are usually on an "as needed" basis. Unless you were told that your problem was particularly unstable, you may find that you only need to wear your retainers 2 or 3 nights a week. If lost or broken, a new retainer may not be needed. Keep a close eye on your teeth however. If you see rotations, space, or crowding developing which concerns you, please contact our office before things get too bad. Post-retention visits will be on an office visit charge. Fees will be charged for new retainers or, rarely, for additional treatment necessary in the post-retention period due to unfavorable skeletal growth, persistence of a poor muscular environment, or lack of retainer wear which has lead to large-scale relapse.*

Q. What about third molars (wisdom teeth)?

A. *Contrary to popular belief, all the crowding that occurs at the time the wisdom teeth erupt (around 16-22) is not caused by these new teeth. Even people who do not have third molars often experience some crowding, especially the lower incisors, at this age. The eruption of wisdom teeth into an inadequate space may however affect the final result. We recommend that your dentist follows their development; and that the wisdom teeth be extracted if there is insufficient room.*

Q. What about bonded (glued in) retainers?

A. *Although you may come back to see us on a regular basis to have us check fixed retainers this is not really necessary as they can be evaluated by your regular dentist. If anything appears wrong, or if it comes loose, please call us immediately to have it checked. You may have it removed whenever you like. At that time we like to replace it with a removable retainer (current fee) for nighttime use.*