

Benefits Spotlight

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Totally Wired: 5 Tips if You Have Braces or Retainers

Keeping teeth cleaned while barred under braces or retainers can be challenging. Brackets and wires aside, it's crucial to maintain a good oral health routine. These tips will help prevent decay, staining and discoloration – resulting in a stunning post-orthodontia smile.

1. **Brush gently and often.** Preferably after every meal. Food particles and plaque can easily get trapped under wires and brackets, so it's important to address the issue every time you eat. Use a soft-bristle toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Or talk to your orthodontist about interdental or orthodontic toothbrushes, which are specially designed to clean around brackets.
2. **Floss, floss, FLOSS!** Daily flossing makes a big difference. Get between braces and under wires at least once a day. Similarly, it's easier for food and plaque to settle between teeth because it's harder to get to those crevices through the appliance. Special orthodontic floss or a floss threader can be helpful for getting the floss into hard-to-reach places.
3. **Make a date.** Do yourself a favor by scheduling a dental cleaning every six months. A professional cleaning is one of the best ways to ensure that every nook and cranny is getting the proper care. This is also a good opportunity to get a progress report or ask any questions you may have about your hardware.
4. **Keep those tools handy.** Go the extra mile by cleaning your retainer with a toothbrush. Before you even put your retainer in your mouth, clean it with a toothbrush and toothpaste. Your orthodontist may also suggest soaking your retainer in a cleaning solution. Wash your retainer before you store it, then pat it dry to prevent bacteria growth. Do not keep a damp retainer in an airtight container for long periods. And be sure to remove your retainer before eating!
5. **Keep in mind that non-traditional braces need cleaning, too.** Don't neglect removable aligners. Special cleaning kits are typically available, but brushing and rinsing your removable braces in lukewarm water also works.

Smile Friendly Concessions

From professional baseball games to the state fair midway, concession stand cuisine is pretty commonplace over the summer. Although most of the sweet offerings at these places aren't the best for your smile, there are plenty of choices that are better than cotton candy and funnel cakes.

Peanuts

Not only are they a tasty snack, peanuts are also a great source of protein, manganese and vitamin E. PRO TIP: Just don't use your teeth to crack open their shells!

Burgers

Hamburgers are fine for your teeth. Consider adding cheese, lettuce and tomato, which will provide a healthy dose of calcium and vitamins C and K.

Ice Cold H₂O or Tea

Hot summer days call for cool, refreshing drinks. Quench your thirst with water or unsweetened iced tea instead of sodas and sports drinks. Not only are they better for your teeth, they also keep you hydrated during warm weather. Just be aware that iced tea has the same teeth-staining properties as hot tea.

Chocolate (Yes, you read that correctly)

Here's welcome news for chocoholics: When nothing but a sweet treat will do, chocolate is the best way to satisfy that craving. It doesn't cling to teeth like chewy and sticky candies do. When sugar sticks to enamel for a long time, it can cause bacteria growth, and, eventually, cavities. That means you should opt for a chocolate candy bar instead of gummy candies or sweets with caramel or toffee.

Plan ahead and bring your own snacks from home. String cheese, fresh fruit and nuts, as well as refillable water bottles, are easily portable and are allowed in some ballparks and fairgrounds. Just be sure to check the facility's food and drink policy before you go – or be prepared to take your snacks back to the car.