

# ORTHODONTICS AND BRACES PAIN

## *A beautiful smile depends on a healthy mouth*

Everybody knows that braces, or orthodontics, straighten their teeth and improves their smile, but it's important to understand that good oral hygiene is the key to keeping your teeth and gums healthy and attractive long after your braces come off. In order to keep your teeth plaque-free and avoid the unsightly "white spots" that can develop around your braces, you need to understand how to keep your teeth and orthodontic devices clean. Brushing and flossing with braces requires extra effort but that effort will pay off in the long run.

### How should I brush with braces?

How your teeth look when your braces come off depends on how you take care of them while they're on. A power toothbrush that is specially designed to clean around orthodontic appliances can help. Before you get started, remove elastics, bands or removable parts of your orthodontic appliances.

- Hold the brush parallel to the floor against the side of your teeth. Guide the power brush head from tooth to tooth, following the natural curve of your teeth and gums
- Hold the brush in place on each tooth for a few seconds before moving on to the next tooth – With a power toothbrush, you don't have to press hard or scrub. Just let the brush do all the work for you
- Don't forget to brush the insides of teeth, the tops of teeth, and the back of your mouth behind your back molars
- Clean brackets by angling the brush head against them. Make sure the brush also cleans under the wires

Remember to replace your toothbrush or brush head every 3 months so it continues to clean efficiently.

### Flossing with Braces

Although it can be difficult, for healthy teeth and gums, flossing with braces is still very important.

- Insert the floss threader between 2 teeth below the wires of your braces. Pull the floss halfway through
- When you reach the gumline, pull the floss into a C-shape
- Make sure to floss below the gumline with a gentle up-and-down motion

### Don't forget to rinse

Rinse twice a day, after brushing, to help prevent cavities, strengthen enamel, and freshen breath. Use a fluoride toothpaste without the burn of alcohol.

### Braces Background

Knowing a bit about how orthodontics work can help you prepare for the braces pain you might experience. Braces place continuous pressure on the teeth to slowly move them into a different position. The key components of braces are:

- **Brackets:** A bracket is attached to each tooth or to a band placed around the tooth. Brackets hold the wires that actually cause the teeth to move. Braces pain associated with brackets may include pain from the band or the brackets.
- **Wires:** The wires used for braces are known as arch wires. They are attached to the brackets, and an orthodontist adjusts them at regular visits. Sometimes braces pain occurs soon after the braces are adjusted.<sup>1,2</sup>

### What Causes Braces Pain?

Braces can correct misaligned teeth to improve your smile and your dental health, but braces pain can make you uncomfortable. The exact cause of braces pain is unknown, but it may be attributed to internal or external factors.

- **Internal:** Some research has shown that braces pain may be caused by changes in blood flow that occur when the braces apply pressure to the teeth.
- **External:** The physical rubbing of the brackets and wires can cause braces pain in the soft tissue inside the mouth. This type of braces pain usually lessens with time, as the tissues become tougher. Sometimes one of the arch wires can cause braces pain by poking into the back of the mouth, but orthodontic wax can usually relieve this.<sup>1,2</sup>

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### How to Soothe Braces Pain

Many products are available to provide relief of braces pain. For pain associated with the pressure of the braces, try over-the-counter pain relieving products. Motrin or Advil can provide relief of braces pain, or you can use topical pain relieving products. Ask your dentist for recommendations if your braces pain persists. In addition, toothpaste, mouth rinse, and dental floss designed for sensitive teeth can help relieve tooth pain.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Other Strategies to Help Relieve Braces Pain

Try these additional tips to relieve braces pain:

- **Eat Soft:** If you tend to experience braces pain after an orthodontic adjustment, stick to soft foods, such as Jello®, pasta, and soft-cooked vegetables for the first day or so.
- **Brush Soft:** A soft-bristled toothbrush can help ease braces pain.<sup>2</sup>

### Protect Your Braces to Avoid Pain

If you play contact sports while wearing orthodontics, be sure to use a mouth guard. Being hit or falling during sports can cause brackets to break or wires to come loose, which causes braces pain and adds to the expense of orthodontic care.<sup>2</sup>

### Benefits of Braces

Braces pain can be uncomfortable, but wearing braces to improve your bite can help to eliminate other types of mouth and tooth pain caused by misaligned teeth. Other benefits of braces include:

- **Easier Oral Care:** Straight teeth are easier to clean, so you will be at less risk for tooth decay and gum disease.
- **Increased Confidence:** When braces have corrected your misaligned teeth, you'll enjoy the improved self-confidence that comes with a healthy smile.<sup>3</sup>

1. <http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/guide/braces-and-retainers>

2. <http://www.bracesguide.com/duringbraces/duringbraces08.html>

3. <http://dentistry.about.com/od/orthodontics/a/Doyouneedbraces.htm>