The Retention Phase of Treatment

**What is retention?**

CONGRATULATIONS! Your braces will be off soon however the work is not done. Removal of braces signals the start of the stabilization period of orthodontic care. This part of your orthodontic treatment is just as important as the active movement phase in determining the ultimate success of your treatment. Once the teeth have been moved into their desired positions, a period of time is needed to stabilize the teeth so that the surrounding bone and soft tissues can conform to your new dental alignment. **Retainers must be worn to prevent the teeth from relapsing to their original positions**. The more severe the original problem, the greater the tendency for post-treatment changes. If you stop wearing your retainers, some degree of relapse will occur.

The position and fit of teeth generally changes throughout your life, with or without orthodontic treatment. The eruption of teeth, placement of dental restorations, and the aging process all contribute to unwanted tooth movement. Forces exerted by the lips and tongue can also cause subtle changes in tooth positions. **Our goal for you in the retention phase of your treatment is to limit these changes to the natural process of accommodations while maintaining both a good functional and aesthetic result.**

**How long are retainers worn?**

To achieve initial stabilization it is necessary to wear retainers full time during the first 4-6 weeks while we are waiting for your permanent retainers to be made. You are to wear these at all times except when eating, brushing, and flossing. These initial retainers are clear temporary retainers (or your last aligner if you were in *Invisalign*) and will become your spare set after you receive your permanent retainers (made of plastic and wires). Once you receive your permanent retainers they are to be worn for 4 weeks 24/7 and then worn at night indefinitely as long as it is desired to keep your teeth straight.

Each person’s requirements are different and a longer period or a different schedule may be recommended if muscular habits contributory to the original mal-alignment of the teeth persist or is facial growth is not complete. **The only way to predictably maintain the corrected tooth alignment indefinitely is with permanent or lifetime retention**. This means trying in your removable retainer every night and wearing it if it feels tight.

**How much of the retention process is covered under my original treatment agreement?**

At the time of removing your braces or upon completion of your treatment, one temporary set of retainers (clear plastic) and one permanent set of retainers (Plastic/wire or clear plastic) are provided as part of the treatment agreement. Additional “spare” retainers may be purchased at a reduced rate **at the time your treatment is completed.** This is an inexpensive way to protect the investment you have made in your straight teeth! The permanent retainers are constructed to last for decades, if properly handled. If the retainers are lost or broken, there is a charge for replacement or repair.

The majority of any settling of the teeth occurs within the first 12-24 months after the braces have been removed. It is during this initial stabilization period that we monitor your care. After approximately 24 months of observation, regular retention checks are no longer necessary. If you wish to return to our office after this period of time for a check-up or to replace a damaged or lost retainer, we will be happy to see you and there will be a charge for this service.

**Taking care of retainers**

Retainers should live in two places, **“In your face, or in the case!”** Keeping the retainer either in the mouth or its case will avoid loss or breakage, which would lead to extra expense. Brushing a retainer with cool water and toothpaste or hand-soap and soaking it in a denture cleanser or mouthwash periodically will keep it fresh. Never place a retainer in hot water or heated environment, as it may become distorted and require replacement. If a brush is not available after eating, rinse off the retainer and place it back in your mouth or in its case. Beware of putting your retainer in a pocket where it might become broken. Also, avoid leaving it out where pets could find it as it they are known to eat them!

**What if a retainer is lost or broken?**

Phone the office right away for an appointment to replace or repair your retainer. (510) 272-0967. Although there will be a charge for replacement or repair, it’s a relatively inexpensive way to protect the investment you have made in your orthodontic care.