

INSTRUCTION FOR ALIGNERS

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU ARE ON YOUR WAY TO A FANTASTIC SMILE!

Aligners are a big investment in your smile, so make sure you take great care of them!

HOW SHOULD I TAKE MY ALIGNERS IN AND OUT? To wear your aligners, use your hands and fingers to put them on and **do not "bite" them into place**, as biting will deform them. If the aligner is difficult to seat in one region, you may need to gently twist the aligner inwards or outwards in that area so that it grips better around the tooth before being seated.



To remove your aligners, use one finger, **dislodge the aligner from the BACK (molar/premolar) area and on the INSIDE (right or left palate or tongue side)**. Then, dislodge the other side (from the back and inside, the other right or left). Finally, remove by pulling forward towards the middle. It is important **to not develop a habit of pulling the aligner out from one side only, as this may crack the aligner in the middle**, compromise its fit, and interfere with your treatment.

If you have long nails, please be **careful to not fray the edge of the aligner**, as this will also distort the aligner and compromise its fit. Aligner removal tools are available online or at your local drugstore.

HOW OFTEN DO I NEED TO WEAR MY ALIGNERS? Aligners **must be worn 20–22 hours daily**, or else results will be compromised. Even if it looks like the aligner fits, if worn for <20 hours, the teeth will deform the plastic more than the plastic moves the teeth. Thus, the aligner will appear to be fitting but treatment effects will be sub-optimal.

Aligners should be worn for one week each before moving on to the next one, unless otherwise directed by our office. You should change into a new aligner before bed. The longer a new aligner is worn without interruption, the better the result.

HOW SHOULD I STORE MY ALIGNERS? CAN I THROW THEM OUT? Make sure to place your **aligners back in their case** any time you are not wearing them. People who place their aligners in napkins tend to throw them away or sit on them, and people who place their aligners on the table tend to have their aligners eaten by their dog (dogs are attracted to the food and saliva in the aligner) or stepped on.

Make sure to wear your aligners in the correct numerical order. If you forget how to read the number on the aligner, please ask us to demonstrate again.

We typically advise **keeping the last 5–10 aligners, and not immediately discarding an aligner after you wear it. It is important that you put the old aligners into the correct bag to avoid mix-ups**. Sometimes, if teeth are not tracking well, or if you have misplaced an aligner, we will ask you to go back to old aligners.

If aligners are not worn as directed (20–22 hours, out for eating and brushing, worn in the correct order), routinely misplaced or discarded, or otherwise repeatedly damaged and unwearable such that treatment is compromised, fees may apply to your contract.

WILL MY ALIGNERS HURT? Soreness is normal during treatment, especially immediately after treatment is started and after changing into your next aligner. Most patients notice some discomfort 24–48 hours after changing an aligner. Any over the counter pain reliever can be used to help ease any discomfort (similar to what you would use for a headache – Advil, Motrin, Tylenol).

Sensitivity can also occur as the teeth are shifting around – you may find some teeth are **highly reactive to cold or hot** for a few weeks, or that some teeth are clashing in an unusual way (bite changes), causing tenderness. Most of this type of sensitivity is transient and will cease in a few days or weeks. If it is persistent for more than a month, let your orthodontist know.

If you are wearing **rubber bands or having spaces closed with power chains, those auxiliaries may also cause soreness**. Keep in mind that with rubber bands, the soreness tends to decrease after the first 2–3 weeks as your teeth become accustomed to the rubber bands. Also keep in mind that the **more consistently you keep the rubber bands on, the less they hurt**. If you feel pain at your jaw joint from the rubber bands (not the teeth), please inform your orthodontist.

MY ALIGNERS DON'T HURT. IS SOMETHING WRONG? If your aligners do not feel “tight” enough, it is not a cause for concern. Sometimes, the healthiest way to move the teeth is with light pressure – so light that you cannot feel a thing and it feels like there is no “snap” or “suction.” That looseness can be good for movement and cannot always be eliminated.

HOW DO I KEEP MY TEETH CLEAN? Proper home care and oral hygiene is of the utmost importance during orthodontic treatment. Without proper home care, there can be significant irreversible damage: scarring on the teeth, formation of large cavities requiring root canals and crowns, gum disease, bone loss, tooth loss, and more.

Brushing **at least twice per day with an electric toothbrush and a 2-minute timer** is the first step towards proper home care. Brushing technique is also key – the **bristles have to be angled 45 degrees away from the gums and the teeth** to properly to remove the food.

Make sure you reach all surfaces of the teeth – the outside, inside, and the chewing surfaces. Try to work on three teeth at a time and clean them completely before moving on to the next three. To reach between the teeth, you will need to be sure to wrap the floss around the tooth like a “C” shape, cupping the surfaces between the teeth in order to rub away any trapped food. If you need help with this, ask us to show you how! Don't forget that a **professional cleaning from your dentist every 3–6 months during orthodontic treatment is essential for the health of your gums, bone, and teeth**.

I LOST/BROKE/FINISHED WEARING MY ALIGNER! WHAT DO I DO? If you misplace or accidentally discard an aligner, or an aligner breaks, please move on to the next aligner and wear it for an extra week (if you were about to change aligners anyway, no need to wear it an extra week). If the next one does not fit, go back to wearing the previous one (indefinitely) and schedule an appointment with us to figure out next steps. **It is extremely important that you are always wearing an aligner, at least at nighttime, or else the teeth will shift and then none of your aligners will fit anymore**. If you find that your aligners are routinely breaking, there may be an issue with how you are removing them. If aligners are not worn as directed (20–22 hours, out for eating and brushing), routinely misplaced or discarded, or otherwise repeatedly damaged and unwearable such that treatment is compromised, fees may apply to your contract.

MY ALIGNER DOES NOT GO ALL THE WAY DOWN ON MY TOOTH. IS THAT A PROBLEM? If you see a significant gap between the tooth and the aligner (more than 1 millimeter), that indicates a *tracking* issue. The most common cause of poor tracking is insufficient aligner wear or irregular aligner wear (<20 hours, out of order). The next most common cause is that the movement is naturally difficult to express and/or the tray is having a difficult time grabbing on to the tooth. We may need to add an attachment to that tooth during your refinement scan to better express the movement.

The first step to remedy poor tracking is to use chewies, or bite sticks, to help the aligner sit better on the tooth. You should use chewies at least 15 minutes each time the aligner is inserted, and whenever you have free time – working on the computer, at home watching television, whenever you have a chance to gnaw on something to help the aligner sit better.



If multiple teeth gave gaps or the tracking does not improve, you can call us to schedule an appointment to check the fit of the aligner. Many of the times, if the overall result and progress does not appear to be compromised, we may ask that you continue to progress through your aligners. As long as other movements progress well, there is value in continuing through your set of aligners – having even some movements express will pave the way for future movements later. Other times, we may do a new scan for you to re-engineer the movements.

HOW DO I KEEP MY ALIGNERS CLEAN? It is extremely important that you brush the inside of the aligner each night with cold water and soap or toothpaste to remove any debris – this step will also help minimize any staining or “yellowing” of the teeth, and will help prevent irreversible damage to the gums and enamel. It is also critical that aligners are removed for eating, drinking, and brushing, and after eating you should brush before you put them back in. The only item you may consume with the aligners in is cold water – no smoothies, green juice, alcoholic beverages, or gum is permitted. Some mints can be consumed with aligners, but they must be specifically designed for aligner usage. Movemints (sugar-free, sweetened with xylitol) are the most common aligner mint.

I FINISHED MY FIRST SET OF ALIGNERS BUT MY TEETH AREN'T STRAIGHT. WHAT HAPPENS NOW? After your initial scan and your initial set of aligners, you will need further scans and more aligners. Any additional scans are called “refinement” scans. That is the reason why we often emphasize that you should not focus on the number written on your box! On average, a typical patient requires 3–5 scans in total (including the initial), and up to 5 scans will be included with your treatment. If further scans are desired for detailing purposes, additional fees may apply.

The days that we scan you are the most important days of your treatment, since that is when we design your next set of aligners. Communication regarding treatment is key on the day of the scan. If you feel certain teeth are still not straight, the bite is not correct, there are small spaces left, etc – let us know on the day of the scan.

I HAVE A LISP AND I NEED TO TALK A LOT FOR WORK/SCHOOL. WHAT CAN I DO? A lisp is normal for the first 2–4 weeks of treatment. Typically, it goes away on its own as the tongue and lips adapt to the thickness of the plastic and re-learn to form certain sounds. A mild, residual lisp may persist, but will be more noticeable to you than to others, and it should not be a cause for concern. If you want to take the aligners out for a one-time presentation or project, that should not be a problem. However, avoid routinely taking your aligners out while having to talk, as this will only slow the process of the lisp disappearing.

WHY ARE MY GUMS PUFFY AND SWOLLEN? When brushing is anything less than 100% perfect, the gums will swell and grow due to the plaque and bacteria under your gums. Once they swell and grow, it is even harder to clean under them. Even more bacteria gets caught under them -- then the puffing starts to cycle! It is then hard to reverse the puffing until treatment is done, which is why it is so important to maintain good hygiene from day 1! In those who start out with spaces between their teeth, the tendency towards puffy gums is even higher because the gums tend to bunch up as the spaces close. Aside from good brushing, you can use **warm salt water rinses** (1 teaspoon of salt in a cup of warm water, swish for 30 seconds and do not swallow) to keep the swelling to a minimum. Also, after you brush regularly, you can **dip your tooth brush in warm salt water or another type of mouthwash**, and specifically scrub under the gums for another 2–3 minutes.

IS IT NORMAL FOR MY GUMS TO BLEED? If you see redness and bleeding from your gums during treatment, it means that your brushing and flossing need some attention! Ask us if you need help. **DO NOT let bleeding gums scare you and make you brush less! It is the complete opposite** – it is a sign you need to brush more carefully, better, and longer. Once you brush through the bleeding and brush well for 2–3 weeks, the bleeding should stop on its own –that’s how you know you’ve done a good job!

WHAT ARE WHITE SPOTS? If brushing is not ideal or if food/liquid builds up, bacteria also builds up and then destroys the calcium and minerals that make your teeth strong. Most of this destruction happens right at the perimeter of the attachment or aligner, which is the hardest part for toothbrush bristles to reach, and, thus, where the bacteria builds up the most. When we finally remove the attachments and get a clearer look at the tooth surface, this destruction becomes apparent as a rectangle- shape “**white spot lesion.**” Unfortunately, white spots are permanent damage and they cannot be removed without costly restorations. In extreme situations, severe demineralization will cause the teeth to break down – don’t let it get to that point!



WHAT HAPPENS IF I BREAK AN ATTACHMENT? If there is a **broken attachment, don't panic!** A broken attachment is not a true emergency and it tends to happen more frequently at the start of treatment. One or two broken attachments rarely compromises treatment, and may not always be replaced. If there are 3+ broken attachments,

please be mindful of dietary restrictions, and see us sooner rather than later for repairs. We will let you know at the start of treatment if there are any particularly essential attachments that will need immediate replacement.

MY ALIGNER IS LIFTING UP IN THE BACK. IS SOMETHING WRONG? If your aligners feel like they are lifting in the back, you can gently squeeze the aligner in the back to help it catch onto the tooth better. It is not a cause for concern. Sometimes that lifting and “light grip” on the back teeth is necessary for certain movements to work. If you need a demonstration of the squeezing, give us a call.

WHAT CAN I DO IF MY ALIGNER IS IRRITATING MY CHEEK? If an aligner is irritating your cheek, the best quick-fix option is to use a clean nail file or sandpaper to sand the edge of the aligner. Often times, a few aligners will feel irritating in an area, and then the irritation will later go away once a movement is expressed or once the inside of the cheek adapts. You can also use orthodontic wax (available for purchase at major drugstores or online) to cover the area. If it seems like an excessive amount of sanding, call us to schedule an appointment and we'll see if we can help.

HOW CAN I GET MY ALIGNERS FINISHED UP SOONER?

1. Keeping your appointments and being on time.
2. Wearing your aligners and elastics 20–22 hours per day. Make sure you are following all instructions on foods to avoid and how to take care of your aligners.
3. Keeping your teeth and aligners clean and healthy and seeing your general dentist for regular check-ups. Sometimes we have to pause treatment if we are worried about the health of the teeth and/or gums.

MY TEETH FEEL LOOSE! IS THAT OK? Some looseness of the teeth is normal during orthodontic treatment, and it takes 6 months after treatment stops for the teeth to solidify and stabilize. The reason retainers are important for the first 6 months after the treatment is that shifting occurs more easily while the teeth are so loose. You can think of it as the gums and bones becoming “soft” as they remodel. They require 6 months of stabilization to “harden.”

As stated above – don't forget that a **professional cleaning from your dentist every 3–6 months during orthodontic treatment is essential to help the gums, bone and teeth “harden” and heal once the treatment is done.** Without these cleanings, gum disease may develop. Gum disease interferes with the healing process, and can lead to permanent looseness of the teeth and permanent gum loss once treatment is complete.

WHY DO GAPS KEEP OPENING AND CLOSING? I HAVE GAPS THAT WERE NOT THERE BEFORE! Some spaces may form, get bigger, or get smaller during treatment as we move the teeth around. Most spaces will close unless your orthodontist has previously informed you that specific spaces may need to remain for orthodontic or other dental reasons.

WHY DOES MY BITE FEEL DIFFERENT? It is normal for the bite to feel different during and after treatment – some teeth will hit extra hard, others will not touch. Children adapt better to changes in the bite than adults do, but rest assured all of the changes are normal during treatment. At the end of treatment, if some teeth still do not touch, your orthodontist will let you know if it is expected that the bite will continue to “settle” and come together after treatment is complete.

WHAT FOODS DO I HAVE TO AVOID WHILE I HAVE ALIGNERS? Aligners generally have fewer dietary restrictions than braces do. That said, we do advise staying away from excessively **hard, crunchy, or chewy foods – especially in the first 48 hours after attachments are placed (bonded)**, as they can cause attachments to break. Minimize consumption of:

Ice	Popcorn Kernels	Crunchy Bread (Toasted Pizza Crust, Toasted Bagels, Crusted Sourdough)
Meat on Bones (should be removed from bone)	Nuts	Hard, Sharp Chips