

Retainers: Commonly Asked Questions

1. What determines the type of retainer I get (metal or clear)?

The vast majority of our patients get clear retainers because we feel that they are superior to the older metal retainers in a number of ways. They are more esthetic, they cause less speech problems, and they hold the teeth in position better than the metal retainers. In addition, they are easier and less expensive to make, which allows us to keep our overall fees and retainer replacement fees lower.

5. What about permanent or bonded retainers?*

At first glance, these seem to be the “perfect answer” for holding teeth straight. Like most things in life, however, they have their disadvantages as well. For one thing, these retainers can be very difficult to floss and keep clean, causing an increased risk of cavities. They can also pop off easily, often at times or in places when it is difficult to come back in for a replacement before teeth move. Lastly, it can sometimes be very difficult to do bonded retainers on the upper teeth, depending upon how the lower teeth and upper teeth meet when biting. There are definitely certain situations where bonded retainers are indicated, and we do use them when appropriate**. However, it is our belief that removable retainers work best for the majority of patients.

**Bonded retainers are wires that are bonded, or glued, directly onto the back of front teeth to hold them in position.*

***If at any point, you as a patient (or a parent) feel that you (or your child) are simply not going to wear retainers regularly, let Dr. Lowe know as soon as possible, and we can discuss the possibility of doing bonded retainers.*

4. What happens if I don't wear my retainers regularly?

Well, you could get very lucky and be one of the few whose teeth stay pretty straight on their own. **However, the odds are very much against you!** Most people's teeth will become crooked again without consistent retainer wear – often to the point where more treatment is needed with either new retainers or possibly even braces again. All this can be prevented with regular retainer wear!

3. How long do I need to keep wearing my retainers? (i.e. At what point can I stop wearing my retainers?)

Unfortunately, there is no definite point where we can say it is safe to stop wearing retainers. Studies have clearly shown that teeth that were once crowded will almost always tend to get crowded again without good retainer wear. In fact, even teeth that were straight to begin with (without braces) will often tend to crowd as we age.

Bottom line: If you want to make sure your teeth stay straight, keep wearing your retainers!

2. How long will my retainers last?

The clear retainers that we use are surprisingly very sturdy. If taken care of and kept clean, they can last up to 4-5 years (or even longer). Eventually, these retainers can become stained and/or stretched to the point that they need to be replaced. Patients are encouraged to return to our office (or another ortho office if living elsewhere) if and when they feel that their retainers are in need of replacement (The replacement cost of clear retainers is usually less than half the cost of metal retainers).