

Orthodontic Basics

There are several basic components that are, in one form or another, common to most orthodontic systems. Acting together, they deliver the forces that will efficiently straighten your teeth. Brackets are the individual attachments that are bonded to each tooth. They can be metal or a tooth colored material. Bands are metal rings, with special attachments, that usually are placed around the back teeth. The arch wire is engaged in each bracket and band, and delivers the force that moves the teeth. An elastic tie, or "O" ring, is used to hold the arch wire into the bracket. A some-what stronger type of an attachment to hold that arch wire in place is called a ligature wire. A power chain is used to link teeth together and close space. Hooks may be present on your appliances. They are used to attach elastics or special springs. An elastic or rubber band is often used to help adjust the bite. They are placed by the patient, and it's imperative that they be worn as Dr. Esser directs.

Separators

Metal or rubber separators, or spacers, are only used before your banding appointment, in order to create very slight spaces between the teeth. This created space makes it easier to place the metal bands, usually around the back teeth. When flossing avoid the spaces between the teeth where the separators have been placed, or they may be dislodged. For the same reason avoid chewy and sticky foods. If the separator comes out more one day before your next appointment, call the office to have it replaced.

Eating with Braces

Certain foods have to be avoided or changed, in order to avoid damage to your braces. That can help save unwanted costs for repairs and delays in your treatment time. No gum or sticky foods such as caramels, licorice, Now and Later, Starburst or Skittles. Avoid hard foods such as nuts, hard candy, hard pretzels, hard taco or tostada shells, crusted bread and tortilla chips. Minimize your sugar intake. This means avoiding cookies, candy, soda and high sugar fruit juices. These foods in combination with braces and without scrupulous oral hygiene are disastrous. Remember to brush your teeth or at least rinse vigorously with water after eating or drinking anything sugary. Cut apples and carrots into bite size pieces. Cut corn away from the cob and meat away from the bone.

Harmful Habits

Habits that can be harmful to appliances include chewing on ice, pens or pencils, fingernails and picking at your braces. They not only knock bands and brackets loose, they also bend and distort the arch wires. This results in your teeth moving in the wrong direction and greatly increasing your treatment time. A good rule of thumb is not to play with your braces, and when it comes to food, if it's hard or even somewhat hard don't chew on it. Mouthguards that fit over your braces should be worn while participating in any contact sport. Dr. Esser will provide these protective devices.

Possible Complications

A bracket or a band can become distorted or displaced and it's usually because of eating the wrong foods, chewing on something hard or picking at your braces. It's not an emergency unless discomfort is involved. However, you need to call the office to schedule an appointment to replace the damaged loose band or bracket.

Headgear

If you have to wear headgear don't ever engage in any athletic activity or horse play when it's in place. This can be extremely dangerous.

Oral Hygiene

To prevent damage to your teeth during your treatment, thorough oral hygiene is imperative. Poor or mediocre care of your teeth can and probably will, cause permanent and unsightly damage to your teeth. Don't let this happen; develop a pattern of brushing that covers all the surfaces of all your teeth. Brush the entire surface of each tooth using an oval or circular motion with the toothbrush, tilt it and brush slowly around the braces. That's where plaque and debris accumulate. Concentrate on the area between the braces and the gums, gently placing the bristles under the gum tissue. Focus on spots that have hooks and attachments because plaque and food particles accumulate there. Brush the chewing or biting surfaces of the teeth and the inside surfaces of the teeth and don't forget your tongue. There is a special kind of brush that's used for those hard to reach spaces around your braces. It's called a Proxibrush and will be provided when you start your treatment. Place the Proxibrush under the arch wire and gently clean around the attachments and under the wire. If there's space, gently push the Proxibrush between the teeth with a rotating motion. Don't force it, but try to do this between all of the front and back teeth if you can. Your teeth and appliances should shine after each brushing. Brush after each meal or snack and at bedtime. Floss between the teeth at least once a day. Use a fluoride rinse at night. And you can always swish water vigorously between your teeth whenever you have the chance. The added benefit is substantial.