

# How to Keep Your Retainers Clean After Your Braces Come Off

Getting retainers is often the happiest time for an orthodontic patient. [After years of braces](#), your teeth will soon be "free!" But it isn't entirely carefree. You need to wear your retainers exactly as your orthodontist tells you or your teeth could shift back to the way they were before braces. And since retainers cost several hundred dollars to replace, you want to keep them clean, odor-free, and safe from breakage!

## Why Do I Need to Wear Retainers?

After your braces come off, the periodontal ligaments that hold the teeth in place are still loose from the pressure of your braces. Generally it takes anywhere from 3 to 9 months for the periodontal ligaments to tighten up and "remember" the new positions of your straightened teeth. This is why it's so important that you wear your retainer exactly the way that your orthodontist



recommends. You just spent years in braces -- this final step is very important for keeping your smile as beautiful as it was the day your braces came off!

Most orthodontists tell their patients to wear their retainers 24/7 for the first few months. Gradually you can switch to wearing the retainers only at night. And after a year or more, you might be able to "get away with" wearing them several nights per week. But if you want your teeth to stay in their new positions, you can't totally stop wearing your retainer. You will

need to wear it at least several nights per week for the rest of your life to keep your teeth in their proper positions. Teeth are dynamic and respond to the pressures of daily living (the position of your tongue, the way you bite and chew, etc). Over time those pressures will move the teeth. Wearing your retainers helps to ensure that the teeth remain "retained" where they were on the day your braces came off.

## How to Clean Retainers

One of the biggest challenges to wearing retainers (and even Invisalign-type aligner trays) is keeping the retainers and aligners clean. Bacteria build up on the retainers and aligners the same way that they build up on teeth. If you don't keep your aligners clean, very quickly you will notice that they smell bad and have an ugly layer of white gunky film. If you don't clean your retainers or aligners properly, the film will harden and become almost impossible to remove. This is true for all types of retainers (plastic and wire Hawley retainers, clear Essix retainers, aligner trays, snoring and bruxism devices, etc).

How can you [keep your retainers clean](#) and odor free? There are several ways.

- Always rinse your retainers in warm water after taking them out of your mouth. Before putting your retainer into a retainer case, give it a quick rinse. This will wash away some of the surface bacteria. Do not use an anti-bacterial hand wipe on your retainer. The chemicals in antibacterial hand wipes may be toxic if they are put into your mouth!
- The easiest method for cleaning retainers is the good old-fashioned toothbrush. If you have a plastic and wire Hawley retainer, you can brush it with toothpaste on a soft toothbrush. However, this method is not recommended for Invisalign-type clear aligner trays or clear Essix retainers (which look like aligner trays). The toothpaste can scratch the clear plastic and over time, your retainers will not be "invisible" anymore.
- Some people recommend soaking retainers in a weak solution of hydrogen peroxide diluted with water, or even an alcohol-based mouthwash. This helps to kill germs, but doesn't address the white gunky build-up. In addition, these harsh chemicals can damage the surface of the plastic over time, turning it yellow.
- Some people use denture cleaning tablets to clean their retainers or aligners. This will seem to work at first, but over time the harsh chemicals in the denture tablets will turn your retainer yellow. This is because the denture tablets are strongly formulated to clean false teeth, not retainers.



This is the reason why the companies that make retainers have come out with special cleaning products. These products are formulated to kill germs and remove the white buildup without harming the plastic in the retainers. Two products work extremely well for this purpose: SonicBrite and Retainer Brite. Both products can be found on the DentaKit website.

SonicBrite makes a retainer cleaning kit which includes cleaning powder and a portable battery-operated sonic bath. It's easy to use: just place some warm water in the sonic bath, put in a small spoon of SonicBrite powder, and turn on the unit. The vibrations from the unit help to loosen debris from your retainer or aligner tray, and the powder kills more than 99% of the bacteria. After 15 minutes the unit shuts itself off. Simply remove your retainer, rinse in cool water, and you're good to go! If your retainer has not been properly cleaned in a long time and contains a lot of white build-up, two cycles in the SonicBrite kit usually remove all of the debris.

Another product that most dentists recommend is Retainer Brite. This product comes in tablets (similar to denture cleaning tablets) but is formulated gently, specifically for retainers. Unlike denture cleaning tablets, Retainer Brite will not turn your retainers or aligners yellow. To use Retainer Brite, just fill a cup with warm water, drop in one Retainer Brite tablet, and in about 10 minutes your retainers are clean and odor-free. There is also a portable battery-operated sonic cleaner that you can optionally buy to use with Retainer Brite, which vibrates and helps to loosen debris from your retainer or aligner tray.

Which product is better? It depends on your needs. If your retainer or aligner tray has a lot of white build-up, the SonicBrite powder will do a better job of removing it. This is good option for people who have not properly cleaned their retainers and need to strip away gunky build-up and keep it away. However, if your retainer is already fairly clean, you can use Retainer Brite tablets daily to keep it fresh. They both cost about the same amount of money (around \$30 for a supply that lasts several months up to year). Some people buy both products and use SonicBrite for a deep cleaning and Retainer Brite for everyday use. Both SonicBrite and Retainer Brite have been endorsed and used by dentists and orthodontists worldwide.

## Keeping Your Retainers Safe

"I lost my retainer!" These are dreadful words that you will hopefully never say. It can take 2 to 3 weeks to make a new retainer, and most orthodontists charge anywhere from \$100 to \$250 or more to make a new set of retainers. This is because most retainers are made by outside labs, so the orthodontist must send the mold of your mouth to the lab to have a new set of custom retainers fabricated. Obviously you want to keep your retainers safe and accounted for at all times. The best way to do this is with a good retainer case. Your [orthodontist](#) will probably give



you a retainer case when you get your retainers. But if you want more than one case, or if you want a case of a specific color or size, the DentaKit web store carries a wide selection of all types of retainer cases, both hard and soft.

The most common way that retainers are lost is by wrapping them in napkins. You can't see the retainer inside the napkin, you forget about it, and soon the napkin gets tossed in

the garbage. Unless you want to spend hours digging through the trash, it's better to put your retainer into a proper case - never use a napkin!

Should you get a hard case or a soft case? That depends on where you keep your retainer. If you are *not* going to keep your retainer in a place where it will potentially get "smashed," then you can opt for a soft case. But if you tend to put your retainer in your pocket, or a backpack where it may get buried under heavy books, it's best to get a hard case to protect your retainer from breakage. Some retainer cases include a hole or a loop for attaching it to a keychain clip or a lanyard, which keeps them easily within reach. Boys and men may want to get a retainer case in a dark color, but keep in mind that bright colors are easier to find at the bottom of a backpack, briefcase, or purse.

Be sure to label your retainer case so that it will get returned to you if it gets lost. If your retainer case doesn't come with an ID sticker, use an address label or write your name and phone number inside the retainer case in permanent marker.