

Wearing and Caring for Your Clear Aligners

The wear requirement, your tray schedule, daily care, and how to handle the common problems

22 HOURS A DAY IS THE TREATMENT — EVERYTHING ELSE IS DETAIL

Aligners only move teeth while they are in your mouth. Wearing them 18 hours instead of 22 does not slow treatment slightly; it commonly stops progress and causes trays to stop fitting.

PATIENT	TOTAL TRAYS	CHANGE INTERVAL As directed by your dentist	NEXT VISIT
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YOUR DAILY ROUTINE

WHEN	WHAT TO DO
Waking up	Remove the aligners. Brush and floss your teeth. Rinse the aligners in cool water and brush them gently with a separate soft toothbrush and clear liquid soap.
Every meal and snack	Remove the aligners first. Store them in the case, never in a napkin. Do not eat or chew anything with the aligners in.
After eating	Brush your teeth, or at minimum rinse your mouth thoroughly, before putting the aligners back in. Food or sugar trapped under an aligner sits against the tooth for hours.
Throughout the day	Drink only plain cool water with the aligners in. Everything else comes out first.
Before bed	Brush and floss. Clean the aligners. Insert them and seat them fully with chewies for 5–10 minutes.
Tray change day	Change to the next tray at bedtime, not in the morning. The first hours of a new tray are the tightest, and you sleep through them.

SEATING THE TRAYS PROPERLY

- Insert the front first, then press evenly over the back teeth on both sides.
- Never bite the aligners into place. Biting warps them and cracks the attachments.
- Use chewies for 5–10 minutes after each insertion, biting gently and moving them around the arch.
- Check for gaps between the aligner and the biting edge of each tooth. A visible gap means the tray is not fully seated.
- Remove from the back molars first, working forward on both sides, then lift the front off.
- Use an aligner removal tool if your nails make removal difficult.

Unseated trays are the most common reason treatment falls behind schedule.

CLEANING — WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DAMAGES THEM

DO	DO NOT
Rinse in cool water each time you remove them	Rinse or soak in hot water — heat warps the plastic permanently
Brush gently with a soft brush and clear liquid soap	Use toothpaste — it is abrasive and makes them cloudy
Soak in a cleaner made for aligners or retainers	Soak in mouthwash, denture cleaner, or bleach unless your dentist approved it
Air dry before storing	Store them damp in a closed case
Keep the case with you at all times	Wrap them in a napkin — this is how most aligners are thrown away

TROUBLESHOOTING

PROBLEM	WHAT TO DO	WHEN TO CALL US
Soreness or pressure for 1–3 days after a new tray	This is expected and means the tray is working. Cold water and, if your dentist advised it, your usual pain reliever.	If it does not ease after 3–4 days
A rough edge irritating your cheek or tongue	File it very gently with an emery board, or apply orthodontic wax.	If irritation continues or a sore develops
An attachment (small tooth-colored bump) falls off	Continue wearing the current tray. Keep the piece if you have it.	Call within a few days to have it replaced
A tray cracks or splits	Continue wearing it if it still seats, or go back to the previous tray if it does not.	Call the same day
You lose a tray	Go back to the previous tray immediately. Do not skip ahead to the next one.	Call the same day
The tray no longer seats fully	Return to the previous tray and wear it full time.	Call within 1–2 days
You missed several days of wear	Go back to the last tray that fits properly and wear it continuously.	Call so we can adjust your schedule

THINGS PEOPLE DO NOT EXPECT

- A temporary lisp for the first few days. It resolves as your tongue adapts; talking more, not less, speeds this up.
- Increased saliva for the first day or two.
- Small tooth-colored attachments bonded to some teeth. They are part of the treatment and are removed at the end.
- Slight spacing between teeth during treatment, which usually closes in later trays.
- Your dentist may polish narrow amounts of enamel between certain teeth to create space. This is planned, not damage.

AFTER THE LAST TRAY

Teeth move back toward their original positions throughout life. Retention is not optional and it is not temporary.

- You will be given a retainer, a bonded wire behind the teeth, or both.
- Full-time wear is usually required first, then a reduced schedule your dentist specifies.
- Retainers need the same cleaning care as aligners.
- If a retainer feels tight after not wearing it, wear it more — do not force it and do not stop.
- Replace a lost retainer promptly. Relapse can happen within weeks.

FICTIONAL SPECIMEN. Bright Harbor Dental and this instruction sheet are invented for demonstration only. Aligner systems differ; follow the wear schedule, change interval, and care instructions given to you by your own dentist or orthodontist. This is not dental advice.