

Retainers for Life - Seriously? **Written by Keith R. Dobrin, DMD, MBA**

Don't worry, this article will not be one of those dry public service announcements from your neighborhood orthodontist telling you how much trouble you will get in for not wearing your retainer (although, I hope by the end of this you realize how important retainers really are). Follow along with me and I'm sure you will not only be entertained but you should also learn a thing or two as it pertains to retainers.

Retainer – is defined by Webster's as “a device or structure that holds something in place, such as a dental appliance used to hold teeth in the correct position *especially after orthodontic treatment.*” For those who had the good fortune of being provided orthodontic treatment as a kid, this one word can bring us back to the good old coming-of-age days while simultaneously making us cringe. “*Yes mom, I'm wearing my retainer!*” And just about all of us have a vivid memory of searching the under the couch or through the bed sheets while panicking just thinking about what would happen if we didn't find it. Or how about digging through the trash can at a family party or restaurant for this dreaded thing that somehow just blends in wherever it ends up. They've been thrown out, left in the oddest of places, stepped on, chewed up by the dog, and all the while they are still relevant and a critical component post-treatment to this very day. Who would've known?

For those of you unfamiliar with the concept of retention following orthodontic treatment, let me explain further. If you or your child just finished with any type of treatment, no matter the length of time you were treated for and regardless of whether it was expanders, braces, or Invisalign, your teeth looked a lot different when you started compared to treatment completion. Making teeth look and feel great is what we do for our patients at Bancroft Dobrin Orthodontics, but getting to that point is only half the battle. The other half? You guessed it, holding your teeth in place! Teeth have a tendency to want to drift back into the positions they originally started in for many biological reasons. Put simply, teeth are held in the bone with fibers and surrounded by gingiva/gums which make up this entire complex, and when we move them into different places all parties must acclimate to the new the positions over time. Initially it is of utmost importance to wear the retainers full time and then slowly decrease the total time per day retainers must be worn until it becomes a nightly or every other night task.

Just as we all age and our bodies go through changes, so do our teeth and the entire oral environment. Our children see their pediatricians at least yearly and as adults we get physical exams just to check that all systems are a go. Teeth are no different. For the children who completed expander treatment and are waiting on more teeth to grow in, we want to maintain the positions and the successful outcomes we achieved in their first phase of treatment while awaiting more growth. For the adolescent patient who finished treatment just before starting high school, it is important to monitor development and eruption of the wisdom teeth, and make sure that no complications arise in that time frame. For the adults whose teeth looked a certain way for 10 years, 20 years, etc. and now they are in the ideal positions after deciding to pursue treatment, we don't want them to revert back to their original state. And for those of us who had treatment and lost or stopped wearing our retainers and noticed teeth starting to shift, let's get those teeth back to where they belong before it gets worse!

At Bancroft Dobrin Orthodontics, we follow along with our patients indefinitely because we have seen it all and we know what it takes to maintain incredible results after comfortable and successful orthodontic treatment. So the next time you hear the word retainer, think of all those times you smiled so bright and full of confidence in those candid selfies, or when your child showed off those perfectly aligned teeth in their yearbook photos, all thanks to great orthodontic treatment followed by great retention. And if you happened to have lost, misplaced, or broken a retainer, give us a call and we'll take care of you!

Dr. Keith Dobrin (from *Bancroft Dobrin Orthodontics* and *XtraOrdinary Smiles Orthodontics*) is a **NATIONALLY BOARD-CERTIFIED** orthodontic specialist with a degree in Advanced Education in Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics. His research on braces adhering to teeth has been published, and given his experience and expertise, he has been selected to test various orthodontic products including clear aligners from national companies. Schedule your complimentary consultation appointment today!