

PATIENT GUIDE

Bonded retainers: the thin wire behind your teeth

What a fixed retainer does, how to clean around it, and the one food habit that breaks it. · 30 Aug 2026

A bonded retainer (a fixed retainer) is a thin wire glued to the back of the front teeth, usually the lower six and sometimes the upper. It holds those teeth in line without you doing anything, which is why we like it for the teeth most likely to drift. It needs a little extra care when cleaning and a little caution with hard food.

Living with it

Your tongue finds it for the first few days and then ignores it. Speech is unaffected. You will not feel it working. It stays in place for years, and we check it at retainer visits and your dentist checks it at yours.

Because it holds only the front teeth, most people wear a removable retainer over the top as well, on the schedule we give you; the two do different jobs.

Cleaning around it

1. Brush behind the teeth

Angle the brush up under the wire from below and down from above, so the bristles reach the glue pads and the gum line.

2. Floss with a threader

A floss threader or a superfloss with a stiff end lets you pass floss under the wire between each pair of teeth. Once a day, ideally at night.

3. Or use a water flosser

A jet along the wire does most of the job in a few seconds and is the easiest option for many people.

4. Keep your dentist cleans

Tartar collects along a bonded wire faster than anywhere else in the mouth. A professional clean every six months keeps the gums healthy behind it.

Good to know

- Biting straight into something hard with the front teeth (a crusty roll, an apple, a bone) is what breaks the glue. Cut, then chew at the back.
- A pad of glue that comes off ONE tooth leaves the wire in place but lets that tooth drift. It needs re-gluing within a couple of weeks.
- If the whole wire comes off, keep it and wear your removable retainer full time until we see you.

Message us if

- The wire feels loose on any tooth, or you can lift it with your tongue.
 - A tooth behind the wire looks like it has moved.
 - The wire is poking or has a sharp end. Wax over it until we can smooth it.
- Call us on (09)520 1880 or email hello@milkorthodontics.co.nz.