

PATIENT GUIDE

After treatment: keeping the result

Why teeth drift after any treatment, and what keeps a finished smile finished. · 30 Aug 2026

Teeth move throughout life, with or without braces. The fibres and bone around a newly moved tooth take a year or more to settle, and even after that, faces keep changing slowly. Retainers are how a finished result stays finished. They are part of the treatment, not an optional extra at the end.

1 yr until teeth settle

The first year after braces is when teeth most want to drift back. Retainers are worn most in this year.

nights long term

After the first year, most people wear a removable retainer at night. It becomes a habit like brushing.

0 expiry date

There is no point at which teeth stop being able to move. A retainer at night, long term, is what keeps them where they are.

Why teeth drift

The gum fibres that hold a tooth stretch as it moves and pull gently back towards where they came from. The bone around the tooth is new and soft for months. Lips, tongue and cheeks press on the teeth all day. And as we age, the lower front teeth in particular tend to crowd, whether or not there was ever treatment.

A retainer does not fight all of this constantly. It simply holds the teeth still often enough that they settle where they were placed.

What we will give you

Usually one or both of: a removable retainer (a clear tray or a wire-and-plastic plate) worn as directed, and a bonded retainer (a thin wire fixed to the back of the front teeth) that stays in place and works without you thinking about it. Each has its own guide in this library.

Keeping it simple

- Wear the retainer exactly as we tell you at the debond. The schedule changes over the first year.
- Keep it in its case whenever it is out. Most retainers are lost in a tissue or a school bag.
- If it stops fitting, cracks or goes missing, message us that week. A few weeks without one is usually fine; a few months is not.
- Keep seeing your dentist. Retainer checks are quick and we will tell you how often.

Braces move the teeth. Retainers are what keeps them there.