

## First Day in Orthodontic Braces – What you should know

Here are a number of tips, hints and things to expect about your first day in braces. The information is mainly for people getting today's bracket braces, whether metal or ceramic, but the comfort tips apply to people getting aligner braces too. One way or another, your teeth are going to start moving, and you're going to feel it.

- If the orthodontist puts **spacers** (little rubber bands) between two or more sets of teeth a few days before you get the actual braces, it's to create some space for fitting metal bands that go all the way around a tooth. Your teeth will be sore, so, an hour ahead of the appointment, take some Tylenol or ibuprofen or whatever you would usually take for pain relief (get permission if this is during school time for students).
- Full bands are usually put on the back molars, to create a really solid anchor for the tubes that hold the ends of the arch wire. You may also have tiny hooks on these bands, for possible use later with elastics. **For adults with a gold crown** on a tooth, usually a band is needed there, too, as the cement won't work well enough to hold the little bracket that goes on all the other teeth.
- **On the day you get your actual braces** (brackets, bands, arch wire, colored ligatures (elastics that hold the arch wire to each bracket)), you will also want to take a pain reliever ahead of time. Then, **plan on treating yourself to something cold and delicious**: a smoothie, frozen yogurt or other cold treat within a few hours if possible. This will feel great, for a very good reason: the cold temperature actually slows down the movement (which will start right away) of the heat-sensitive arch wire that does the work. Arch wires are made from a nickel-titanium alloy developed by NASA to automatically unfurl solar panels in space. The wire moves in response to warmth, in this case the warmth of your mouth.
- **For plastic-aligner wearers, a cold treat will still feel good regardless.**
- Three, five or more times a day, for the first few days, **swish your mouth for 15 to 20 seconds with salt water** (1 teaspoon of ordinary table salt stirred into 8 ounces of warm water). Do this as long and as often as you like. It will make your gums and the insides of your cheeks feel so much better, soothing the chafing feeling you get where all the new metal bits start rubbing. You *will* get used to it after about three days, don't worry!
- If something feels as though it is really poking you, it is possible that a hook or bit of wire is slightly out of place. Pull off a bit of the wax that the orthodontist gives you and stick it over the problem spot, then call the orthodontist's office. They may tell you to come back in to have them check it out.
- **Eat very soft foods**, such as pudding, yogurt, soup (though not really hot), pasta (such as tortellini), scrambled eggs, applesauce, oatmeal, well-cooked mac 'n cheese, ramen noodles, egg salad, Vienna sausages, very well cooked carrots/corn/peas, baked or boiled potatoes (or sweet potatoes) and mashed potatoes.

*Pamela Waterman is the author of **The Braces Cookbook: Recipes You (and Your Orthodontist) Will Love** and **The Braces Cookbook 2: Comfort Food with a Gourmet Touch**. She gives workshops on patient lifestyle issues to orthodontic professionals, and has been a national spokesperson for the American Association of Orthodontists. Contact her at [thediscoverybox@earthlink.net](mailto:thediscoverybox@earthlink.net).*