

# Ask the Dentist

## What to do if teeth shift after braces



**Q:** I had metal braces when I was a teenager but I have not been wearing my retainers for many years. I am in my 30s now and I realise that my teeth has shifted. What should I do?

**A:** After any orthodontic treatment is completed, we always remind our patients that wearing retainers is a lifelong commitment. Teeth shift, and the retainers will help to hold teeth in their corrected positions after treatment. It is common for teeth to shift out of their newly aligned positions and relapse to their original positions if retainers are not worn.

Nonetheless, do not worry. With the help of a dentist trained in orthodontics, there are three ways to tackle this issue.

### #1: Prevent the shift from worsening

If the shift is not drastic and is acceptable to you, visit a dentist to make new retainers so that your teeth can remain at their current alignment. This would prevent the problem from worsening.

### #2: Realign the shift with fixed appliances

If you do not like the current alignment of your teeth, you may consider getting braces again to correct it. In the case

that you find traditional metal braces too “eye-catching”, other fixed appliances to consider would be ceramic braces, self-ligating braces and lingual braces.

Ceramic braces are tooth-coloured. Although not completely invisible, they look more subtle and are less noticeable compared to metal braces. Similar to metal braces, they are affixed to the teeth and wires are used to connect the brackets.

Self-ligating braces do not use metal or wire ties, making them an aesthetically more pleasant alternative to metal braces. They are designed with a tiny gate to hold on to the archwires gently. Hence, treatment is more comfortable than metal braces. Adjustment appointment times are shortened and the duration of the treatment may also be reduced in certain cases.

Lingual braces are perhaps the truly “invisible” fixed appliance as they are attached to the internal surfaces of the teeth. With this, you can straighten your teeth without the braces showing. Similar to metal braces, teeth are shifted by customised brackets which gently apply pressure to the teeth.

### #3: Realign the shift with removable appliances

If you prefer an appliance that is removable, I would recommend Invisalign®. Invisalign straightens teeth with a series of custom-made, clear and virtually-invisible aligners. As the aligners are removable, one can eat and drink freely and brush and floss normally, resulting in better oral hygiene. Since there are no wires and brackets, there would be less irritation of the soft oral tissues. The intervals between appointments with your dentist for adjustments are longer too.

Compared to fixed appliances, Invisalign would be the most subtle way of straightening teeth. I have a

patient who shared that her family and colleagues did not notice she was wearing aligners until she told them several days later.

This time, no matter which option you decide on, remember to wear your retainers on a full-time basis for the first three to six months (after treatment). Eventually, you would be able to reduce that to only during night time. There is also the option of having fixed retainers. Your dentist would be the best person to advise on the actual retention plan that suits you most.



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orthodontics from the University of London, United Kingdom and is registered as an Orthodontist on the Specialist List of the General Dental Council in the United Kingdom. Dr Eide is accredited to provide treatment with Invisalign® and Incognito™ lingual braces.

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