

PROTOCOL FOR ORTHODONTIC EMERGENCIES

A true orthodontic emergency is rare however, when they do occur, we are available to help you. If you experience severe, persistent pain or discomfort relating to your braces, aligners or appliance, please call our office. We will either guide you over the phone on how to resolve the issue or we will schedule an office visit to assist you further.

You may be surprised and relieved to know many orthodontic problems can be resolved, at least temporarily, by you at home until we can see you in our office. Your comfort is very important to us and managing that first and foremost is key. After alleviating your discomfort, it is very important you call us as soon as possible to schedule an office visit to evaluate and resolve the issue. A disruption in treatment time may occur if your damaged braces/aligner/appliance are not resolved in a timely manner.

WHAT ARE MAJOR ORTHODONTIC PROBLEMS?

- **Trauma or injury** to the teeth, face or mouth.
- **Infection or swelling** of the gums, mouth or face.
- **Severe, persistent, unmanageable discomfort, pain or bleeding** in these areas.

If any one of these situations occur, seek help as soon as possible! Please call our office or a general dentist. As a last resort, head to your nearest walk-in clinic or hospital emergency department.

WHAT ARE MINOR ORTHODONTIC PROBLEMS?

Fortunately, most orthodontic problems are minor, though they may still cause significant discomfort or irritation to your gums, cheeks, lips, tongue and teeth. Here are a few of the more common orthodontic problems, along with some tips on how you can achieve relief at home:

- **Loose Bracket/band**

If your bracket or band is still attached to the wire, you should leave it in place and put wax on it for comfort. If the bracket or band can be removed easily, place it in an envelope and bring to your next appointment.

- **Loose Wire**

If a wire is out of the bracket or band and is loose or bulging, use a pair of tweezers or needle-nosed pliers to put your wire back into place or in a more comfortable position (Clean and disinfect tweezers/pliers with rubbing alcohol, or 3% hydrogen peroxide or thoroughly wash with soap and water before placing in the mouth).

You can't do anything we can't undo. Your comfort is key. If you cannot put the wire into a comfortable position and covering the end with wax doesn't help, as a last resort you can use a small disinfected fingernail clipper. Clip the wire behind the last tooth to which it is securely fastened. If the end of the wire where you trimmed is sharp, place wax on it. If one of the colored elastics is missing, you can use a piece of floss to tie the wire into place.

- **Poking Wire**

Using a pencil eraser or the back of a spoon, push the poking wire down or place wax on it so that it is no longer poking.

- **Poking Appliance**

The lips, cheeks and tongue may become irritated for one to two weeks after treatment begins as they adapt to the new changes and positions. If the appliance is poking, apply wax as necessary and call our office for further instruction.

- **Lost or Broken Appliance**

If you have lost or broken your appliance, please call the office. We may want to see photos of the broken appliance to see if it can be repaired. If the appliance is lost, we will let you know what next steps are to getting you a replacement.

- **Lost or Broken Retainer or Invisalign Aligner**

If you have lost or broken your retainer, please call the office. If you have lost or broken your Invisalign Aligner, you have two options.

1. You can try to move forward to the next aligner, it will probably be tight so consider 2-3 weeks wear of this stage.
2. If it does not fit, please call the office to let us know and go back to your previous aligner until your new one arrives.

- **TMJ pain (Jaw Joint Pain)**

If you suffer from pain in your jaw that you suspect is from your orthodontic treatment, we recommend over the counter analgesic medications as needed as well as a 20 minute warm compress alternating with 20 minutes cold compress. If you are in aligners and the discomfort does not subside, you can try to go to nighttime wear and when the jaw feels better, build back up to 22 hour a day wear.

MANAGING GENERAL DISCOMFORT

Initially, when you begin with braces or when you get new wires placed, it is common to feel some general discomfort with your teeth, cheeks, tongue and lips. Your mouth may feel achy, you may get headaches and/or you may feel discomfort when biting down on anything hard. Typically, these symptoms can last between 3 – 5 days. Using an analgesic (over the counter pain reliever) as recommended, following a soft diet and frequent use of warm saltwater or hydrogen peroxide rinses can help to relieve your discomfort through this time.

- **Warm Saltwater Rinse:**

- ✓ Dissolve 1 teaspoon of salt with 8 ounces of warm water (not hot water!)
- ✓ Rinse and swish vigorously. Spit out the solution. Do not swallow!
- ✓ Can be used up to 4 times a day. Do not use for longer than 2 weeks or discontinue if greater irritation occurs

- **3 Percent (%) Hydrogen Peroxide Rinse**

- ✓ Use 3 **percent (%) concentration** (over the counter) of hydrogen peroxide.
- ✓ Mix two parts water with one-part hydrogen peroxide.
- ✓ Gargle, swishing the solution all around the mouth.
- ✓ Tilt the head back, continue gargling for 30 seconds then **spit solution out**.

Hydrogen peroxide may cause foaming in the mouth which is normal.

A warm washcloth or heating pad placed on the outside of your mouth can also offer some relief. Some patients may prefer cold compresses instead of heat to relieve their symptoms.

Note, it is normal for teeth to feel a little loose during orthodontic treatment — that shows they're moving.

AVOIDING DENTAL EMERGENCIES

To prevent the need for emergency treatment, we recommend that patients in brackets and wires avoid foods that are sticky, crunchy and hard. It is also imperative that orthodontic patients practice excellent home care to avoid dental decay.

Remember, our goal is to make orthodontic treatment as comfortable as possible. Please call us if you have any questions or concerns.

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