Oral hygiene tips for people with braces

Wearing braces is not just about achieving a straighter smile. It requires daily discipline, careful cleaning and smart lifestyle choices to protect teeth and gums throughout treatment.

BY BEATRICE NAKIBUUKA

For many people, orthodontic treatment marks the start of a journey toward improved confidence and better oral health. Yet what is often underestimated is the level of care required to keep the mouth healthy while wearing braces. Though braces offer long-term benefits, they also make oral hygiene more demanding, allowing food particles and plaque to accumulate easily around brackets and wires.

Dr Emmanuel Lubega, a dentist at Ngabi Dental Clinic, says proper oral hygiene during orthodontic treatment is essential to prevent tooth decay, gum disease and irreversible damage to the enamel.

How braces affect the mouth

Braces work by applying controlled pressure to move teeth gradually into their correct positions. Brackets are fixed onto teeth and connected by wires and elastic bands, creating multiple small spaces that can trap food and plaque.

"In a mouth without braces, brushing and flossing are relatively straightforward," Dr Lubega explains. "With braces, cleaning becomes more challenging. If plaque is not removed thoroughly, it hardens into tartar, which can only be removed by a dental professional."

This buildup may result in cavities, bleeding gums and persistent bad breath. One of the most common problems seen after braces are removed is white spot lesions, chalky marks caused by enamel demineralisation due to prolonged plaque exposure. The risk increases when oral hygiene is poor, and sugary foods and drinks are consumed frequently.

Why oral hygiene matters

Orthodontic treatment can last several months or even years. During this time, small daily habits play a major role in determining the outcome. Good oral hygiene protects teeth and gums, ensures smoother tooth movement and helps patients get the most value from their investment.

Healthy gums are particularly important because teeth move more efficiently in a clean, infection-free environment. Inflamed or bleeding gums can make treatment uncomfortable and less effective. In severe cases, dentists may be forced to pause or remove braces to prevent further damage.

Good hygiene also reduces unnecessary costs. Treating cavities, gum infections or repairing damaged braces can be expensive, especially where access to specialised dental care is limited. Prevention remains the most affordable and effective option.

Daily care

Brushing is the foundation of oral hygiene, but with braces, it must be done more carefully and more often. Dr Sulaiman Kintu, a dental surgeon at Suham Dental Clinic, recommends brushing at least twice daily, ideally after every meal.

A soft-bristled toothbrush or one designed for orthodontic patients works best. The brush should be angled to clean above and below the brackets, along the gum line and on the chewing surfaces.

"Brushing should never be rushed," Dr Kintu advises. "Taking extra time ensures food and plaque are removed from areas that are easy to miss, protecting both teeth and braces."

Fluoride toothpaste is essential, as it strengthens enamel and reduces the risk of cavities. Mouthwash containing fluoride or antibacterial agents provides added protection by reducing bacteria and reinforcing tooth strength.

Flossing, though often neglected, is equally important. Brackets and wires create hidden spaces that a toothbrush cannot reach. Using floss threaders, orthodontic floss, or water flossers helps clean between teeth and beneath wires, reducing the risk of gum disease and decay.

"Flossing may take longer at first, but daily practice prevents irritation and long-term damage," Dr Kintu notes.

Diet and braces

Diet plays a critical role in oral health during orthodontic treatment. Sticky foods cling to braces and are difficult to clean off, while hard foods can damage brackets and wires. Sugary snacks and fizzy drinks fuel bacteria that produce acids, which weaken enamel and increase the risk of cavities.

"A diet rich in fruits, vegetables and calcium supports strong teeth and healthy gums," Dr Kintu says. "Drinking plenty of clean water helps wash away food particles and maintains saliva flow, which naturally protects the mouth."

Regular dental visits

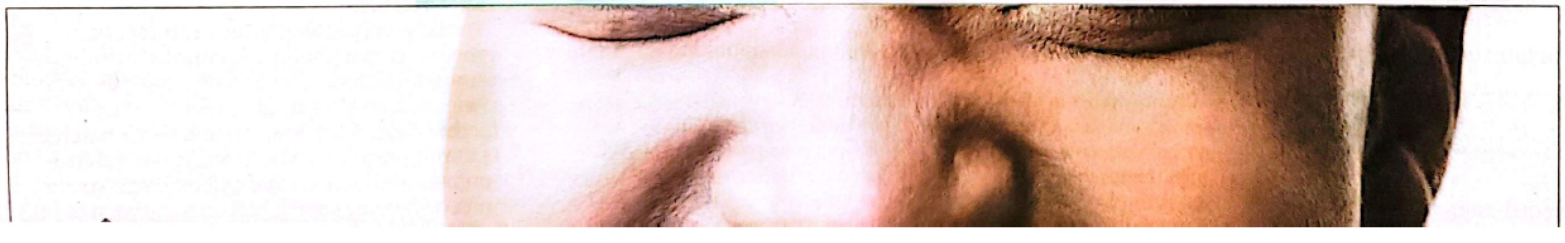
Even with excellent home care, regular visits to the dentist and orthodontist are vital. These appointments allow professionals to clean hard-to-reach areas, monitor progress and detect early signs of problems. Orthodontic adjustments also ensure treatment stays on track.

In Uganda, where distance and cost can lead to missed appointments, Dr Lubega stresses the importance of consistency. Delayed visits can prolong treatment and increase the risk of complications.

WARNING SIGNS

Some oral health problems develop quietly during orthodontic treatment. Dentists warn that early attention can prevent permanent damage.

- Persistent white or brown spots on teeth are early signs of enamel breakdown.
- Gums pulling away from teeth may indicate gum disease.
- Sharp pain when chewing indicates a possible cavity or loose bracket.
- Bad breath that does not improve after brushing is due to bacterial buildup.
- Loose brackets or poking wires can injure soft tissue and delay treatment.
- Swollen gums lasting more than a week are a sign of infection.
- If any of these symptoms appear, a dental visit should not be delayed.



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