

Handling Orthodontic Emergencies

The following orthodontic emergencies and their treatments are listed in the order of the least severe to the most severe. Only the most severe cases may require immediate attention by our office. The majority of these are easily treated with a follow-up appointment.

Ligatures Come Off



Photo courtesy of the Canadian Association of Orthodontists

Tiny rubber bands around the front brackets are known as “color ties”. These ties are simply cosmetic. If one is lost, it is fine to wait until the next visit to have it replaced. A continuous strand of colored elastic called “chain” is used to close spaces. If chain comes off a bracket you may be able to put it back in place using tweezers.

Occasionally, we may use a small, fine wire, known as a ligature to hold the wire to the bracket. If a wire ligature comes loose, simply remove it with tweezers. If the wire ligature is sticking out into the lip but is not loose, it may be bent back down with a Q-tip or pencil eraser to eliminate the irritation.

Discomfort

It's normal for a patient to have discomfort for a few days after braces or retainers are adjusted, but it can make eating uncomfortable. Soft foods, over the counter pain relievers, bite wafers, and warm salt water rinses can help with this discomfort.

Mouth sores



Photo courtesy of the Canadian Association of Orthodontists

Some patients are susceptible to episodes of canker sores. While braces do not cause them, they may be precipitated or made worse by an irritation from braces. One or several areas of ulceration of the cheeks, lips or tongue may appear. This is not an emergency, but may be very uncomfortable for the patient. Prompt relief may be achieved by applying a small amount of topical anesthetic such as Brace Relief directly to the ulcerated surface using a cotton swab. Reapply as needed.

Irritation of Lips or Cheeks



Photo courtesy of the Canadian Association of Orthodontists

Sometimes new braces can be irritating to the mouth, especially when the patient is eating. A small amount of wax makes an excellent buffer between metal and mouth. Simply pinch off a small piece and roll it into a ball the size of a small pea. Flatten the ball and place it completely over the area of the braces causing irritation.

Protruding Wire



Photo courtesy of the Canadian Association of Orthodontists

Occasionally, the end of a wire will work itself out of place and irritate the

patient's mouth. Use a Q-tip or pencil eraser to push the wire so that it is flat against the tooth. If the wire cannot be moved into a comfortable position, cover it with wax. (See *Irritation of Lips or Cheeks*..)

Please make our office aware of the problem.

In a situation where the wire is extremely bothersome and the patient will not be able to see our office anytime soon, you may, as a last resort, clip the wire. Use a small piece of cotton or folded tissue to hold onto the snipped end and use a pair of sharp clippers and snip off the protruding wire. Wax may still be necessary to provide comfort to the irritated area.

Loose Brackets, Wires or Bands



Photo courtesy of the Canadian Association of Orthodontists

If the braces have come loose in any way, please call our office to determine appropriate next steps.

Brackets are the parts of braces attached to the teeth with a special adhesive. A bracket can be knocked off if the patient has eaten one of those hard or crunchy foods orthodontic patients are instructed to avoid, or if the mouth is struck while at play. (All patients, especially those with braces, should wear a protective mouth guard while playing sports.)

If the loose bracket has rotated on the wire and is sticking out, you can do a temporary fix to alleviate discomfort. To put the bracket back in place, use tweezers to slide the bracket along the wire until it is between two teeth. Rotate the bracket back to the proper position, then slide it back to the center of the tooth.