



# Helping Hands

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## DENTAL HYGIENE WITH BRACES

Braces have been put on your teeth to make them straight and nice-looking. It is important to keep your teeth and gums clean and free of plaque while your braces are on. Plaque is a harmful layer of bacteria on the teeth that can cause cavities. Without regular brushing, your teeth may decay. Poor hygiene while braces are on the teeth can also weaken the tooth structure around the brackets, causing white lines around where the bracket was placed. These areas of decalcification may harden and not progress into a cavity, however, the color change will remain.

### YOU WILL NEED

- ❖ A small toothbrush (small enough to reach around the braces). The one you receive from our dental office at your check-up appointments is appropriate.
- ❖ Toothpaste with fluoride.
- ❖ Dental floss and floss threader or pre-packaged threader floss (such as Glide Threader Floss)

### BRUSHING YOUR TEETH AND GUMS

It is **up to you** to keep your teeth clean and your gums healthy. While you have your braces, you need to brush your teeth and gums 5 times a day for at least 3 minutes at each brushing. You can do this when you wake up, after each meal or snack, and before you go to bed. When you brush your teeth, use the method shown below.

### PLAQUE

Plaque is a sticky, colorless film of bacteria and by-products from bacteria that constantly forms on the teeth. Germs live in the plaque and stick to the teeth. The germs digest sugary foods and make acid. If this acid stays on the teeth, it attacks the tooth enamel. This causes cavities and makes the gums sore.

### FLOSSING YOUR TEETH

Flossing with braces is done about the same way as you would floss without braces, except that the floss must be threaded under the archwire and between the teeth. A floss threader, which looks like a large plastic needle or pre-packaged threader floss, can make this easier.

1. Thread the floss under the arch wire.
2. Floss each side of each tooth in the space.
3. Pull the floss out of the space with one hand as you release the floss with your other hand.
4. Repeat this method between the remainder of your teeth.