

## 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 (plak) 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.

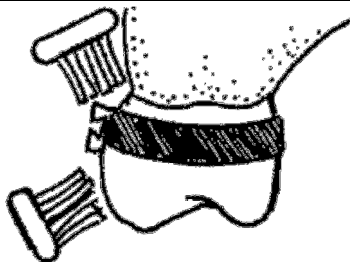
### You Will Need

- A small toothbrush (small enough to reach around the braces). The bristles should be made of soft, polished nylon with a flat brushing surface. Your dentist may recommend a special toothbrush for braces.
- Toothpaste with fluoride.
- Dental floss and floss threader

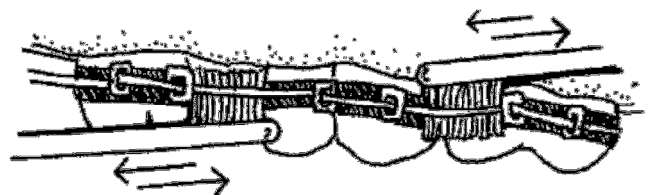
### Brushing Your Teeth and Gums

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 5 minutes at each brushing**. You can do this when you wake up, after each meal, and before you go to bed. When you brush your teeth, use the method shown below.

#### The correct way to brush your teeth.



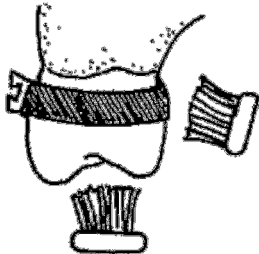
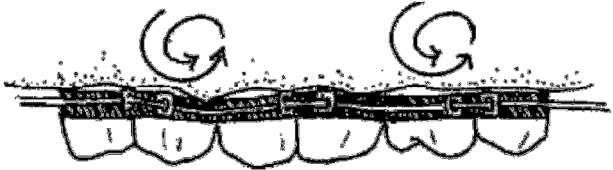
1. Brush at an angle over the top of your band and bracket, aiming right at your tooth. Brush back and forth.



2. Brush up under the bracket-back and forth.

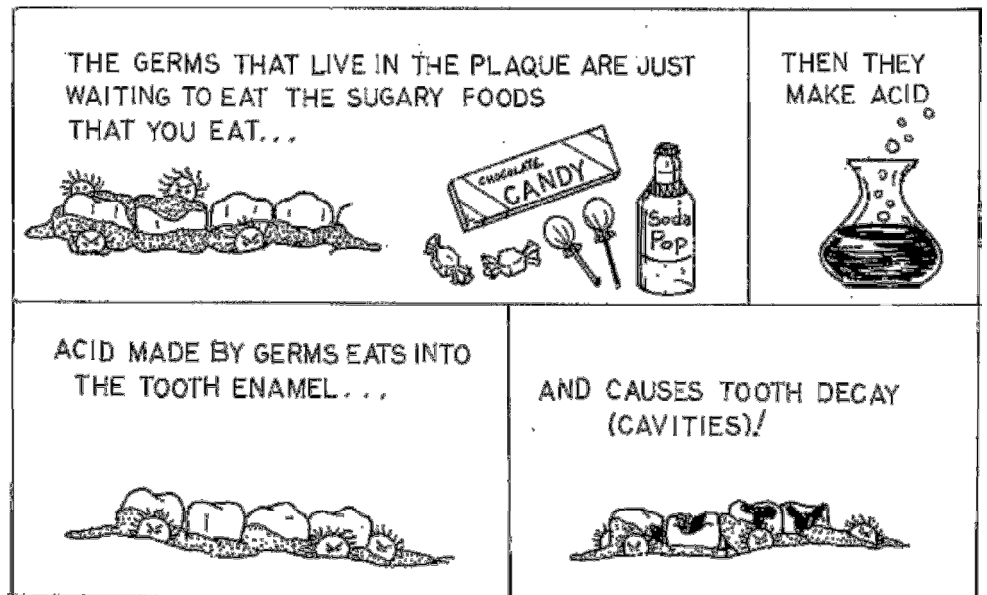
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## Brushing Your Teeth and Gums, continued

	
<p>3. Remember to brush the biting surfaces and the inside surfaces near your tongue. Brush your tongue, too.</p>	<p>4. Use a circular motion when brushing your gums.</p>

## 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 (Picture 2). If this acid stays on the teeth, it attacks the tooth enamel. This causes cavities and makes the gums sore.



**Picture 2** How tooth decay can happen.

## Care of the Braces

To prevent the braces from breaking or coming loose, you should **NOT** eat:

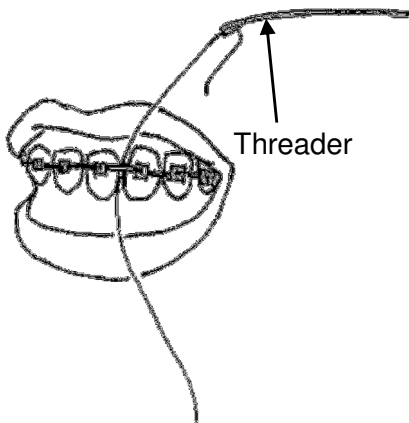
- Corn on the cob
- Caramels
- Bagels (cut them into pieces)
- Ice (do not chew it)
- Taffy
- Whole raw carrots (cut them into strips)
- Peanut brittle
- Hard tack candy
- Whole hard apples (cut them into pieces)
- Popcorn
- Gum of any kind

## Flossing Your Teeth

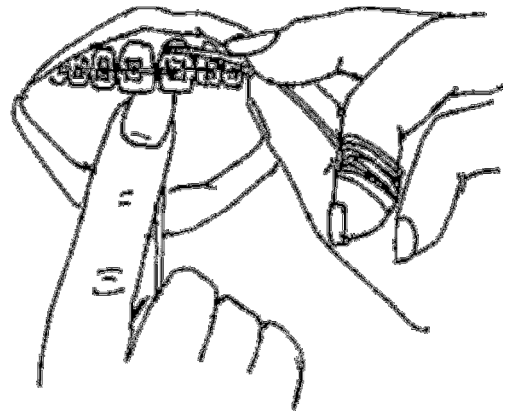
Flossing with braces is done about the same way as you would floss without braces, except that the floss must be threaded under the arch wire and between the teeth. A **floss threader**, which looks like a large plastic needle (Picture 3), can make this easier.

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

If you have any questions, please ask your dentist, dental hygienist, or dental assistant, or call \_\_\_\_\_.



**Picture 3** Thread the floss under the arch wire and between the teeth.



**Picture 4** Floss each tooth well.