



Getting It Straight

by Dr. Kirk Christensen,
Woodstock's Orthodontic Specialist

Q:My daughter's friend finished treatment and has a retainer with a wire. My daughter finished treatment with you (Woodstock Orthodontics) and has a clear retainer with no wires. Is one better than the other?

A: Actually, one is not necessarily "better than the other" from an effectiveness point of view. In fact, to that point, a study reported in the December, 2007 issue of the American Journal of Orthodontics, page 730, showed that the effectiveness (ability to hold teeth in a desired finished position) was clinically insignificant between the two types of retainers. Please note that it was shown that the clear vacuum formed retainers (VFR's) did statistically hold the teeth better than the Hawley type wire type retainer, but the numerical differences may not be noticeable from a clinical aspect. Now, given that clinical effectiveness is mostly equal, (provided that they are worn as directed) is one "better" than another from other aspects? The reasons we at Woodstock Orthodontics prefer a Vacuum Formed clear Retainer over the traditional acrylic and wire Hawley retainers are as follows: 1) Flexibility. VFR's have an elastic quality which allows for forgiveness if a patient skips days or a week. They can be squeezed in and will realign the teeth if they shift. Hawley types are rigid and may not be able to be resealed if teeth move. 2) Durability. Hawley acrylic is prone to fracture, and wires are prone to bending or breaking, where flexible VFR's are bendable (within limits) and have no wires to distort or break. 3) Ease of fabrication. VFR's are less time and material consuming, and can mean cost savings to a patient of a couple hundred dollars each, if replacements are needed. 4) VFR's don't smell bad. The acrylic in a Hawley is like a sponge that soaks up saliva and bacteria. VFR's are non porous and therefore don't harbor odor causing bacteria, and are easier to keep clean. 5) VFR's are clear! They are essentially shrink wrapped around the teeth. When you are done with wires from braces, why would you want another wire? I hope all my readers had a great holiday season! It is great to be back, after our break. Look for our new website in the next couple of weeks at woodstockortho.com. All of my past articles will be posted there.

!Dr. Christensen's column appears weekly in the Northwest Herald. Questions to be answered and treatment inquiries may be directed to: **Woodstock Orthodontics, c/o Kirk H. Christensen, DDS, 226 West Judd Street, Woodstock, IL 60098, Phone: 815-337-5522**