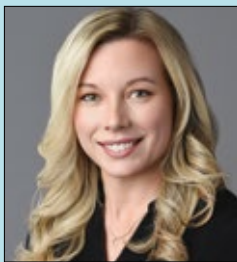


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Intro to Ortho: What Every Dental Hygienist Should Know

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A specialty office's atmosphere differs significantly from a general practice. Don't get me wrong: from a dental hygienist's point of view, there are many similarities. A bustling waiting room, the constant ringing of phones, the sounds of fingers typing on keyboards, and the regular beeps, hisses, and ticks from the sterilization centre are all unmistakable traits of the dental office. However, the orthodontic office's differences are more profound than the superficial sights, sounds, and smells.

The first thing you will notice upon entering an orthodontic office is the open-concept nature of the clinic. Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, some offices have added a few more walls. However, most maintain this open-concept design. This is because appointments are significantly shorter in an orthodontic setting; most offices schedule 15 to 20 minutes for a routine adjustment. The open concept allows the doctor or doctors easy access to the clients currently in the treatment area. Of course, because of the open-concept design, privacy must be a top concern. Black-out filters are often installed on computer screens to protect client charts. Support persons for the clients are usually limited to one parent or guardian; in some offices, access to the treatment area is limited to clients only. After the appointment, a staff member will discuss treatment with the parent or guardian in a private room.

Instruments in an orthodontic office resemble those you are likely to find in a toolbox in a garage rather than in a dental office. Pliers fill most of the orthodontic cassette, and scalers are few and far between. Most orthodontic offices use cassette systems for organization and ease for the operator and to maintain infection control standards. Each cassette set typically contains four or five pliers, a



▲ *Distal end cutter*



▲ *Mathieu*



▲ *Ligature director*

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mouth mirror, and a ligature director. The ligature director is an instrument similar to a scaler but with no blade or cutting edge. Some of the more common pliers included are a Weingart, Mathieu, pin and ligature or straight cutter, distal end cutter, and bird beak. The high-speed handpiece is another instrument widely used by a registered dental hygienist in an orthodontic office. It is within the dental hygienist's scope of practice to use a high-speed handpiece to remove orthodontic resin after debonding, remove attachments for clear aligner therapy, and remove and/or repair bonded lingual retainers.

The schedule of a dental hygienist working in an orthodontic office may be overwhelming at first. Because most offices schedule 15 to 20 minutes for a routine adjustment, it is not uncommon for a dental hygienist to see 15 or more clients a day, as opposed to the typical 7 in a general practice. A variety of appointments are booked for the dental hygienist that can include bonding brackets for either a full mouth or single arch; debanding or debonding (removing brackets and bonding lingual retainer wires); clear aligner therapy client checks; appliance insertions, checks, and removals; the taking of diagnostic records; retainer checks; and of course the usual wire changes and adjustments.

Oral hygiene instruction is even more important with orthodontic appliances due to the increased difficulty of keeping them clean. Stressing the importance of diligent oral hygiene and staying away from hard and sticky foods to prevent appliances from breaking is critical to achieving the best possible treatment outcome.

As registered dental hygienists, we are collaborators, not competitors. If you see one of your clients for their dental hygiene appointment and notice that they have started orthodontic treatment, don't be afraid to ask questions. Reach out to their orthodontic office if you see something damaged or broken or if you have any other concerns regarding their treatment. On the other hand, if you notice one of your clients has an orthodontic issue or concern, let them know that a referral to a specialist's office is an option for them.



▲ Pin and ligature or straight cutter



▲ Weingart



▲ Bird beak plier