

DEFINITION

WHAT IT MEANS TO WEAR BRACES

Kris Honold

(1) One of Webster's definitions of a brace is: "a dental appliance worn on the teeth to correct irregularities of growth and position." This is a formal, intimidating definition that tells what braces are but isn't able to define what wearing braces really means. Believe it or not, wearing braces isn't all bad for a high school student. As a veteran brace-wearer I learned all the "tricks of the trade" and discovered the good and bad features during the three years I wore them. Certainly wearing braces has different meanings at the three phases of treatment: before, during, and after.

(2) Before you have them put on, wearing braces especially means dreading the pain of the procedure. It means being nervous about how you'll look, being afraid you won't be able to eat or brush your teeth, and wondering how long you'll be afflicted with them. While some kids vow never to smile again, others are eager because they consider braces to be fashionable. Yet others know that having straighter teeth will improve their looks, so they don't mind a year or two of inconvenience. Those whose teeth are so crooked that they may cause health problems realize that wearing braces is a necessity.

(3) Now that you have them on, wearing braces means getting called great nicknames like "metal mouth," "tinsel teeth," or "Jaws" after the bad guy in recent James Bond movies. Your visits to the orthodontist come about once a month and you

dread them because you're normally in pain for a few days after each visit. On those days you learn to love jello, pudding, ice cream, and soup. If you were able to eat, your mother would surely make whatever you want because she feels sorry for you. Wearing braces means your toothbrush goes where you go because half of your food is usually left in the hard-to-clean wires. If you're as lucky as I was, you get to wear all sorts of neat contraptions to pull some teeth this way or push those back (I never really knew which). First was the headgear--a thick wire hooked into the top braces and strapped around the neck. Then on one trip to the orthodontist I got a bag of cute, tiny rubberbands and four new hooks fastened onto my wires. I wore the rubberbands from front to back on the top, and from the top front to the bottom front. They really liked to pop off in my mouth or at whomever I'd be talking to. All I had to do was sing or open my mouth too far. I think I lost track of how many I mistakenly swallowed! The favorite joke about braces is that two people who wear them will get hooked together when they kiss. From experience I know it's possible, but fortunately the worst problem I encountered was getting cuts on the inside of my lips. It just made kissing more of a challenge! Of course, the last event is the great day you get them off. You won't think it's great, though, when you feel like your teeth are getting pulled off along with the braces.

(4) Once your braces are finally off, you feel relieved but still a bit uncomfortable. Your lips feel as though they are sticking out. That will last only until you look in the mirror. Then having worn braces means you feel good about yourself because you like how you look. It means loving to brush your teeth because you're actually brushing teeth, not metal, and no longer having mutilated bristles on your toothbrush. Most of all, getting your braces off means wanting

to smile all the time to show off your new pearly whites. It can really help you feel like a new person. Retainers that can be taken in and out are now my only reminder that I ever wore braces. But I don't mind remembering because, to me, wearing braces means that I made it through three busy high school years with them--and came out smiling.