

CHRISTEL A. HUMMERT, DMD
Board Certified Orthodontist, NJ Specialty Permit #5563
500 Morris Avenue, Suite 106, Springfield, NJ 07081
(973) 379-4471
www.GardenStateOrthodontics.com

PALATAL EXPANDER

There are several types of orthodontic problems that can be treated with a palatal expander. A palatal expander can help relieve crowding, can correct a crossbite, broaden the smile, and improve the shape of the palate. We like to use “fixed” palatal expanders, which are expanders that are glued in place with a special kind of dental cement. They are not visible to other people unless you tip back your head and show them that you have one. We feel that the fixed expanders are superior to removable palatal expanders because you don’t have to worry about taking it in and out or breaking or losing it. It also works faster than the removable type of palatal expander.

HOW DOES IT WORK?: The upper jaw, or maxilla, is joined in the center by a suture, or joint, which can be painlessly separated and spread in younger patients. This is because the two bones that join the palate together do not completely fuse together until the teenage years. With a fixed palatal expander, we open the space between the palatal bones. After we have you stop expanding the appliance, we will keep your expander in without turning it to allow your bone to gradually fill in over the next 6-8 months.

WHAT TO EXPECT: Your palatal expander will be “glued” in place by Dr. Hummert. Once in place, it takes a little getting used to, but most of our patients are comfortable with their expander by 3-7 days after it is inserted. There will be an adjustment period when you first get your expander: there will be a lot of saliva in your mouth, you may have difficulty swallowing, your speech will be affected, and it will feel really weird. It will also take some time to get used to eating with it, so start out with a soft diet (pasta, eggs, yogurt, smoothies, chopped meat, etc.) All of this gets better with time, so hang in there!

WHAT TO AVOID: Please do not eat anything hard or sticky while you have your palatal expander. Hard and sticky foods can cause the “glue” to become loose, and this can cause your expander to get loose and possibly come out prematurely.

HOW TO TURN IT: You or one of your parents will turn the expander with the “key” provided once in the morning and once at night (2 times per day) until we get the space that we need, usually by turning for a total of 4-14 days. The key is inserted into the hole of the expansion screw and pushed all the way to the back of the mouth until the next hole is in view. As the expansion screw widens, you may feel tightness and soreness on the molars to which it is attached. You may also have a funny feeling up in the roof of your mouth and even in your nose when the key is turned the first few days. After the first couple of days, you probably won’t feel anything at all when the screw is turned. Tightness, discomfort, and soreness are normal, however, the turning should not be painful. If it is painful, skip a day of turning and resume the next day. **During expansion, you may notice a space develop between your upper two front teeth as you continue the expansion. This means that you are turning the screw correctly, and getting true palatal expansion, so don’t worry!** Sometimes this space will close by itself – if not, we can help close it with some braces on your upper four front teeth.



EXPANDER INSERTED



FINISHED EXPANDING

HOW MANY TIMES DO WE TURN THE EXPANSION SCREW?: We usually recommend that you start turning your appliance two times a day, 1 time in the morning and 1 time at night, for 4-14 days, depending on how much expansion is needed.

Dr. Hummert will let you know how many days to turn the screw initially, and then she will see you for an appointment to determine if you will need more expansion. Dr. Hummert will advise you when to stop turning the appliance. After the palate has been widened enough, it is necessary to keep the expander in place for at least 6 months so that new bone has time to fill in the space that has been created. We like to keep the expander in for at least 6 months after you finish turning the screw to allow time for the bone to fill in. Dr. Hummert will let you know when your expander can be removed.

IF YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY TURNING THE EXPANDER, please look on YouTube for videos – there are MANY videos out there, and these may help you. If you are still having difficulty, please call the office.

HOW TO CLEAN IT: You can brush your teeth as usual, and also brush your expander with your toothbrush. Sometimes food gets stuck underneath the expansion screw, but the expander is designed for you to be able to get food out from underneath it. You can use the small proxybrush that we provide, or you can also rinse with mouthwash to help keep it clean. Many of our patients have also found a waterpick to be helpful, but please only use it on the medium setting, not on the highest setting.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE EXPANDER IS REMOVED?: After 6-8 months of allowing your palatal bone to fill in, we will remove your expander and give you a removable retainer to wear. The removable retainer should be worn as directed to maintain the correction that we achieved with the palatal expander. **If you do not wear the removable retainer as directed, most of the work you did with the expander will be lost. Wearing the retainer consistently and as instructed is VERY IMPORTANT!!!**

We hope this answers some of your questions about the palatal expander. Please do not hesitate to call us if you have any other questions or concerns that you forgot to ask at your appointment.