Redwood Pediatric Dentistry
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After a Cleaning: Gum Tenderness and What to Expect

If your child had gingivitis, plaque buildup, or gum overgrowth, the gums may feel tender after the cleaning. This is actually a good sign. It means we got where we needed to go. Here is how to help them heal.

1 Why Does It Hurt After a Cleaning?

When plaque and tartar build up along the gumline, the gums become inflamed, a condition called **gingivitis**. Inflamed gums are puffy, sensitive, and bleed more easily. During the cleaning, the hygienist removes the buildup that is causing the problem, but those freshly cleaned, irritated tissues will be tender for a day or two afterward.



2 Recovery Timeline



- **Most tenderness resolves within 1 to 3 days** as the gum tissue calms down. If soreness lasts longer than a week or gets worse rather than better, give us a call.

3 How to Help at Home

- **Cold foods are your friend:** yogurt, smoothies, cool applesauce, or ice water all help soothe tender gums. Avoid very hot foods for the first day.
- **Pain relief:** Children's ibuprofen (Motrin/Advil) at the recommended label dose can help with gum tenderness. Ibuprofen also reduces inflammation, not just pain.
- **Keep brushing and flossing, gently:** it may feel counterintuitive when gums are sore, but consistent cleaning is what helps them heal. Use a soft-bristled brush and go carefully near sore spots.
- **The gums need consistent daily care:** consistent brushing and flossing keeps the inflammation away and makes the next cleaning easier.

4 Extra Tips for Kids in Braces

- Braces make cleaning harder and create more spots for plaque to hide, which is why gingivitis is more common during orthodontic treatment.
- **The nightly power trio:** water flosser (Waterpik) + Superfloss + toothbrush above and below each bracket. This combination makes a big difference in gum health during treatment.
- **Waterpik setting 7 or higher:** lower settings do not remove debris from around brackets as effectively.
- **Frequent cleanings:** every 3 to 4 months rather than every 6 is recommended during active orthodontic treatment to stay ahead of buildup.

Please Call Us If...

- Gum soreness lasts more than a week
- You notice swelling, bleeding that will not stop, or a bad smell from the gums
- Your child develops a fever or anything that concerns you

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