

Do You Need a Nighttime Mouth Guard?

Do you often wake up in the morning with a sore or a painful jaw? Do you hear a popping sound when you open and close your mouth? Does your tongue have small indentations in it? If the answer is yes to any or all of these questions, then you may be suffering from teeth grinding, also called bruxism. In the United States, bruxism affects about 30 million to 40 million children and adults. Sure, occasional teeth grinding may be more of a nuisance than cause for alarm, but the truth of the matter is, if you do it on a regular basis, it can seriously damage your teeth and affect your oral health. Teeth grinding can occur for several reasons, including anxiety, stress, an abnormal bite, missing teeth and even sleep apnea. While some grinding does occur in the daytime, the most common and difficult to control is bruxism that happens while you sleep. Regardless of why you grind your teeth, the condition can be prevented with the use of a night guard. Wearing a night guard plays a vital role in the treatment and prevention of conditions caused by teeth grinding.

For those who suffer from bruxism, the constant clenching of your teeth puts pressure on the muscles, tissues and other structures of your jaw. These can cause headaches, earaches, jaw pain and muscle soreness. However, there are serious dental conditions that can arise from bruxism.

Teeth grinding can cause the outer layers of enamel to wear away, thereby exposing dentin and creating tooth sensitivity. Teeth grinding can also advance the aging of your teeth or loosen them. Constant grinding may even wear your teeth down to little stumps and cause dental fillings to fall out. Bruxism may also cause or worsen temporomandibular joint problems and disorders (TMJ). Like all other joints in the body, the temporomandibular joint is prone to inflammation and other chronic joint problems. Teeth grinding puts pressure on the joint that can lead to irritation and failure of the joint itself.





Wearing a nighttime mouth guard is your best defense against the harmful oral effects of teeth grinding. It protects your teeth from the trauma of clenching and prevents the molars from grinding together. Before you choose a mouth guard, you need to know your options. There are three different types of mouth guards. The first, called stock mouth protectors, are pre-molded and ready to be worn. They are low-cost and can be purchased at most sporting goods stores and department stores. However, since these are preformed and come in a ready-made size, they do not offer any flexibility to fit each person's mouth and offer little to no protection. They also tend to be very clunky and esthetically unappealing. For these reasons, dentists do not recommend them.

The second type of mouth guards, known as boil and bite mouth protectors, can also be purchased at many sporting goods stores and may give you a slightly better fit than stock mouth protectors. These mouth guards are made from thermoplastic material that is placed in hot water to soften, then placed in the mouth and shaped around the teeth using finger and tongue pressure (hence the name "boil and bite"). However, these mouth guards, while better than stock do not offer anything close to a custom fit.



The third and best option of mouth guards are custom-fitted mouth protectors. These are individually designed and fabricated in a dentist's office. First, your dentist will make an imprint of your teeth and a mouth guard is then molded over this impression model using special material. Because of this special material and the time and work that goes into making it, this mouth guard offers the greatest fit, comfort and protection.

You may have many questions about which mouth guard is most suitable for specific needs. Your dentist can suggest the best mouth guard for you. While it may seem easier and cheaper to buy a ready-made mouth guard at your local sporting goods store, a professionally made appliance customized to your fit your mouth precisely is



your best bet for optimum protection and relief. You may think that teeth grinding doesn't seem to cause much damage in the moment, but over time, it can affect your teeth tremendously. The right mouth guard will make a world of difference in protecting your teeth and preventing further damage.