

Your Bruxism Appliance

Night time clenching and grinding of your teeth is called *nocturnal bruxism*. Most people who grind and clench their teeth at night experience no serious consequences other than mild tooth wear, some minor bone changes or perhaps slight muscular aching and stiffness upon arising. However, for some people, these nocturnal habits are destructive and can result in excessive tooth wear, muscular pain, temporomandibular joint (TMJ – the joint that hinges your jaw), disk derangements (including TMJ clicking and locking of the jaw), and headaches. Most people learn of their bruxism only after being told by a sleeping partner or after their dentist mentions it based on an examination of tooth wear or TMJ problems. Bruxism patterns change over time and are often cyclical. Bruxism tends to increase during stressful times.

Fabrication and wearing of a bruxism appliance (a night guard) is one of the treatments for nocturnal bruxism and joint pain. Other treatments include jaw exercises, muscle relaxants, bite adjustment of the teeth, and TMJ surgery.

Fabrication of the night guard usually involves two appointments: impressions and insertion. The fee for an upper acrylic bruxism appliance is usually \$346 plus lab fees of about \$200 for a total of about \$546 (*ODA 2022 Fee Guide* code 14611).

The night guard works for a number of reasons. It evens the bite and reduces abnormal muscle activity caused by an uneven bite. The jaw is realigned to a more correct position. The opportunity for abnormal muscle activity is decreased. Clenching and subsequent strain on the muscles and ligaments of the TMJ are reduced due to the thickness of the appliance. The teeth are physically protected so the appliance gets worn down rather than your natural teeth.

Your night guard is worn every night. Run your thermoplastic night guard under warm water before insertion in order to soften it and help prevent cracks or breaks. In the morning, brush the night guard with a soft toothbrush and toothpaste to keep it clean and to maintain its longevity. Soaking the night guard with a denture cleaning tablet for 20 minutes once a week will help remove built up deposits. If you are sick, soaking the night guard in Listerine will disinfect the night guard. (The night guard may absorb the colour of the Listerine. This discolouration will go away in a few days.) Always bring your appliance to any dental appointment.