

Occlusal Splints (Bite Guards) for Temporomandibular Disorders (TMD), Bruxism, or Clenching

- 1. Reasons for Occlusal Splints:** The purpose of splint therapy is to allow your lower and upper jaw to come together without tooth contact, thereby reducing muscle pain and tooth wear. Many situations cause the malfunction of your lower jaw. Examples are accidents, surgery, developmental defects, peculiar oral habits, many fillings placed over numerous years, naturally occurring malocclusion (poor bite), orthodontics, psychological stress, clenching or bruxing (grinding teeth), and other conditions.
- 2. What Does an Occlusal Splint Accomplish?** This treatment has been used for many years to keep the teeth from contacting during chewing and to allow the lower jaw to return to a comfortable hinge position without interference and guidance from the teeth. When the splint has been worn for a few days the jaw functions freely. Occlusal splints assist in establishing normal jaw function.
- 3. Types of Splints:**
 - *Full Arch:* Some splints fit on your upper or lower jaw and cover all of the teeth on that arch.
 - *NTI-TSS:* These small splints fit only in the front of your mouth and are used on a part-time.
- 4. When Are Splints Worn?**
 - *If you have a Temporomandibular Disorder (TMD):* You will probably receive a full-arch splint. You should wear the splint at all times including while eating unless directed otherwise. If you remove the splint to eat, your treatment will not be as effective. Many fillings placed in your mouth over the years or other conditions have caused your teeth to meet in a position your jaws cannot tolerate. The splint eliminates tooth-to-tooth contact. Your symptoms will gradually disappear while you are wearing the splint, and your natural teeth, bridges, and/or fillings will be adjusted to the new bite by us. This procedure is called occlusal equilibration. After equilibration, you may be asked to wear your splint only at night. After a period of time, you will not wear the splint at all. The described treatment usually requires a few weeks to several months.
 - *If You Grind Your Teeth Excessively:* You should wear your splint at night when you cannot control your jaw movements or during times of psychological stress. During the daytime, make sure your splint is placed in water to avoid warping.
- 5. Cleaning the Splint and Teeth:** Food accumulates around and under splints. At least one time each day, brush and floss your teeth very thoroughly. Brush and rinse the inside and outside of the splint, and then return it to your mouth. Dental decay will progress in the teeth under the splint in accelerated levels if you are not careful about cleanliness of your mouth and splint. If you have a high dental decay potential, fluoride-containing rinses or gels may be suggested to be placed into your splint once per day.
- 6. When the Splint Is Out of the Mouth:** Your teeth may not meet in harmony. This situation is to be expected because of muscle and jaw relaxation while you were wearing the splint. Occlusal equilibration may be requested to eliminate this improper meeting of the teeth (malocclusion). If the splint is out of your mouth, place it in a container of water to prevent it from warping. You may desire to soak it occasionally in a commercially available denture cleanser. As an alternative, you may soak it in a solution made by adding a few drops of Clorox to a cup of water.

If you have questions or problems, please call us.