

What is a Bite Guard and why do I need one?

There are a surprising number of individuals who either grind their teeth or clench their teeth when they are sleeping. The majority of these individuals are not even aware they are doing this destructive habit. Your dentist is able to see evidence of the wear patterns that are a result of this grinding. There will be flattened or missing surfaces of teeth that are in the pathway of this grinding pattern.

The normal mouth has a system of guidance that should be in harmony with the normal arc of movement of the jaw joint (Tempromandibular Joint - TMJ). When teeth are either missing, or rotated or even slightly out of alignment with the joints, the muscles tend to try to “mediate” this discrepancy. Their efforts result in either grinding or clenching to try and balance this issue. The bottom line is, they never win. The involved teeth will either:

1. Wear away
2. Move
3. Hurt

The individual may also experience headaches, discomfort that radiates along the jaw or limited opening. It is also possible to experience a combination of these symptoms that come and go over many years.

After clinical evaluation, it may be determined that a **Bite Guard** would best help to alleviate the problems associated with clenching and grinding. The **Bite Guard** that is fabricated is a custom made guard that aligns with your jaw joint, and fits your own biting scheme. The design of the **Bite Guard** recreates a “balanced” occlusal scheme. This scheme is designed to pacify the facial muscles involved, and distribute the biting forces to the proper teeth. These Bite Guards are made of a “hard” acrylic. This allows the dentist to adapt and adjust the guidance. Being made of a hard substance maintains this adapted scheme.

The difference between a universal, soft guard that is purchased at a retail store is that there is no real direction for the bite relative to the specific individual. These types of guards are made to cover the teeth surfaces, but not to pacify the muscles of chewing. It has been found that these soft guards actually promote chewing / gnawing due to the softer, chewy nature of the material. It is similar to a chew toy for a teething child. They are designed to gnaw on. The purpose of a **Bite Guard** is to discourage grinding and clenching.

The soft guards can function as an athletic guard to protect against an impact injury, but they do not provide ongoing relief from the adverse effects of a grinding or a clenching individual.

To fabricate a Bite Guard in our office, the following steps are taken:

1. Clinical examination to determine if a **Bite Guard** will help
2. Impressions and bite registration information is taken
3. The **Bite Guard** is then custom designed and fabricated
4. The **Bite Guard** is delivered to the patient and adjusted
5. The patient is seen in 1 week to further adjust and adapt as necessary

A properly fitting and adjusted Bite Guard can last indefinitely. This is because the grinding motion has been eliminated. Check our site for instructions on routine care and cleansing of a **Bite Guard**.