

# Use and Care of a Night Guard

A Night Guard or "Night Splint" is worn during sleep to prevent grinding and clenching which might damage teeth, veneers or crowns and can cause muscle and jaw joint aches. The Night Guard is designed to be worn over your top teeth, to prevent direct tooth to tooth contact. A well made Night Guard will cover all of the top teeth (thus "splinting" them together), and make even contact with all of the bottom teeth. This then prevents tooth movement over time and so a night splint can actually function as a pseudo orthodontic retainer. If your Night Guard still fits a year or more later, then your teeth have not moved!

Night Guards work by upsetting the proprioception between the jaws. When you sleep, your body is used to bringing the two sets of teeth together and then clenching or grinding on them. By introducing a layer of plastic between them (that is, the Night Guard) you are disrupting the normal relationship, and thus preventing the habitual grinding. Eventually though, your body gets used to the night guard, and will begin grinding on it instead. This is not so bad as the plastic of the guard will wear away before teeth or crowns break or wear. However, the aim of course is to prevent the grinding and clenching pattern altogether. Hence the appropriate use of a Night Splint involves a period of night use, where the appliance is worn to sleep every night, and then after this time, the appliance is worn less frequently. We will advise you on the pattern of use that will be more appropriate for you.

The appliance can also protect your jaw joint (TMJ) from the damaging effects of misdirected forces and mal-positioned joint parts. It has been made as strong as possible within the limits of the materials used. Thicker appliances are stronger, but if made too thick, the appliance becomes uncomfortable and unsightly. Many factors have been taken into account to form the final shape of this appliance.

## CARE & CLEANING

The appliance fits snugly to prevent movement. Use pressure on the cheek side of your back teeth to remove the appliance for cleaning. You may have to experiment to find the easiest way to insert and remove it. Thoroughly clean it daily, with a toothbrush and liquid soap or with a denture soak solution, using only cold water.

Avoid extreme heat and cold on the appliance. High temperatures such as cleaning the appliance in hot water may cause warpage and make the appliance unusable. In extreme cold, the appliance becomes very brittle and breaks easily.

Habitual clenching of the teeth onto the appliance may fatigue the plastic. This may make it more brittle and shorten its life.

Do not put the appliance in napkins (i.e. at dinner tables in restaurants) as they get thrown away). Do not put into your pants pocket as they break there too.

## CHANGES IN THE BITE AND JAW JOINTS

If you have been suffering from Temporomandibular dysfunction, your jaw joint may change as it heals and you may notice that your teeth no longer bite properly against the appliance. Periodic adjustments assure the greatest possible comfort and most rapid healing, and you should contact us for an adjustment if you feel your appliance no longer fits well. Sometimes, as the joint heals, it may become impossible to put your natural teeth into their original position. The number of weeks or months required for healing varies with the severity and chronicity of your problem. A minimum amount of time would be three months, however for many people, they may continue to use this appliance off and on for many years.

For people with Temporomandibular disorders (TMD), three months without changes generally indicates stability of the jaw joint. This indicates that the muscles and bone have adapted and stabilized in their proper, healthy positions. Then an analysis can reveal exactly what will be required to establish a healthy bite relationship between the upper and lower teeth. Until the jaw joint is stable and the bite relationship analyzed, it is not possible to tell what final measures, if any, will be required.

## APPLIANCES HAVE A LIMITED LIFETIME

With care, your appliance may last for more than 2 years. However, the normal life expectancy is usually within the time span needed for healing and stabilization of most jaw joint problems. For people with severe TMD, they may require greater time for healing and consequently may require more than one appliance. Small chips sometimes occur around the thin edges. You can smooth these rough edges with an emery board. Sometimes the appliance has larger chips or actually breaks. If an appliance breaks during normal and reasonable conditions in less than six months requiring replacement (i.e., cannot be repaired) it will be replaced at one-half of the standard fee for a new appliance. If an appliance requires replacement after six months, it will be replaced as the standard fee for a new appliance.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns.

perfect smiles

Suite 5,  
158 Graceville Avenue  
Graceville QLD 4075

phone (07) 3379 1555  
fax (07) 3379 1553

info@brisbaneprosthodontics.com.au  
www.brisbaneprosthodontics.com.au