



Night Guards for Teeth Grinding

How Night Guards Help Protect Your Teeth from Bruxism

What Is a Night Guard?

A **night guard** is a removable dental appliance worn while sleeping to help protect the teeth from **bruxism**, a condition that involves grinding or clenching the teeth.

Night guards do not cure bruxism, but they help reduce the damage that grinding can cause to the teeth, dental restorations, and jaw muscles.

Your dentist can determine whether a night guard is appropriate based on your symptoms and oral health.

What Is Bruxism?

Bruxism is the involuntary grinding or clenching of the teeth.

It may occur:

- During sleep (sleep bruxism)
- While awake (awake bruxism)

Many people are unaware they grind their teeth until a dentist notices signs of wear or a bed partner hears grinding during the night.

Signs and Symptoms of Teeth Grinding

Common signs include:

- Flattened or worn teeth
- Chipped or cracked teeth
- Tooth sensitivity
- Jaw pain or stiffness

- Morning headaches
- Facial muscle fatigue
- Ear pain without an ear infection
- Clicking or popping of the jaw

Some people have bruxism without experiencing any symptoms.

Why Is Teeth Grinding a Problem?

Over time, repeated grinding may cause:

- Tooth wear
- Cracked teeth
- Broken fillings
- Damaged crowns
- Tooth sensitivity
- Gum recession
- Jaw muscle pain
- Problems involving the temporomandibular joints (TMJ)

Protecting the teeth early may help prevent more extensive dental treatment later.

How Does a Night Guard Work?

A night guard creates a protective barrier between the upper and lower teeth.

It helps:

- Reduce tooth-to-tooth wear
- Protect dental restorations
- Distribute biting forces more evenly
- Reduce stress on the jaw muscles
- Decrease the risk of tooth fractures

Although it protects the teeth, a night guard does **not** eliminate the underlying habit of grinding.

Types of Night Guards

Several types of night guards are available.

Custom-Made Night Guards

Custom night guards are fabricated from impressions or digital scans taken by your dentist.

They are designed to:

- Fit precisely
- Improve comfort
- Provide better durability
- Offer optimal protection

Most dentists recommend custom-made appliances for long-term use.

Over-the-Counter Night Guards

Boil-and-bite or stock night guards are available without a prescription.

Although they may provide temporary protection, they:

- May not fit properly
- Can feel bulky
- May be less durable
- May not provide the same level of comfort or protection as custom-made appliances

If you continue to experience symptoms, consult your dentist.

How Do You Wear a Night Guard?

Most night guards are worn:

- While sleeping
- Every night or as recommended by your dentist

Your dentist will explain how to insert, remove, and care for your appliance.

Caring for Your Night Guard

To keep your night guard clean:

- Rinse it with cool water after each use.
- Clean it with a soft toothbrush.
- Use a cleaner recommended by your dentist if needed.
- Allow it to air dry before storing.
- Store it in a ventilated protective case.

Avoid using hot water, which may distort the appliance.

When Should a Night Guard Be Replaced?

A night guard may need replacement if it becomes:

- Cracked
- Worn
- Loose
- Uncomfortable
- Damaged

Regular dental visits allow your dentist to evaluate its condition and determine when replacement is needed.

Can a Night Guard Stop Teeth Grinding?

No.

Night guards protect the teeth from damage but generally **do not stop the grinding habit itself**.

Depending on the cause of bruxism, your dentist may also recommend:

- Stress management strategies
- Improving sleep habits
- Treating sleep disorders
- Managing bite problems when appropriate

Treatment varies from person to person.

Can Children Wear Night Guards?

Some children grind their teeth during sleep.

In many cases, childhood bruxism improves as children grow.

If grinding is severe or causes pain or significant tooth wear, a dentist can determine whether treatment is appropriate.

Parents should not purchase a night guard for a child without professional guidance.

When Should You See a Dentist?

Schedule a dental examination if you experience:

- Morning jaw pain
- Frequent headaches
- Worn or chipped teeth
- Tooth sensitivity
- Jaw clicking or locking
- A partner reports hearing grinding while you sleep

Early diagnosis may help prevent permanent damage.

Common Myths

"A night guard cures teeth grinding."

False.

A night guard protects the teeth but does not eliminate the underlying cause of bruxism.

"Any night guard works the same."

False.

Custom-made night guards generally provide a better fit, greater comfort, and improved protection than over-the-counter products.

"Only adults grind their teeth."

False.

Children may also experience bruxism, although many outgrow the condition.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ A night guard protects the teeth from damage caused by grinding and clenching.
 - ✓ Bruxism may lead to tooth wear, fractures, jaw pain, and headaches.
 - ✓ Custom-made night guards generally provide the best fit and protection.
 - ✓ Night guards protect the teeth but do not cure bruxism.
 - ✓ Clean your night guard daily and replace it when it becomes worn or damaged.
 - ✓ If you suspect you grind your teeth, schedule an evaluation with your dentist.
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