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Brighter Smiles

THE POWER OF SMALL

Most people think of a nightguard as a large, bulky, athletic-type appliance. Another common misperception is that a nightguard is used solely for individuals who grind their teeth. On the contrary there are many reasons to protect your teeth at night.....and most who need it are not doing it. What if your nightguard fit on 2-4 of your front teeth?

Studies have shown a link between tooth grinding, clenching and headaches. For people who grind or clench, the muscles that open and close the jaw can become painful from overuse, causing a range of symptoms from tension to migraine headaches to jaw joint (TMJ) problems to tooth pain.

Bruxing (grinding) and clenching teeth is defined as abnormal tooth contact (parafunction). Ordinarily, teeth are in contact while eating and swallowing, only about 10 to 15 minutes on a daily basis. People who grind or clench their teeth during the day, or while sleeping, can have their teeth in contact for as much as six hours a day or more. Researchers say that one night of grinding is equivalent to 80 days of normal wear.

Clenching can be just as bad and in some cases worse than grinding. The average person puts about 200 lbs. of force on back molars during function but a person who clenches can put up to 1000 lbs. on the molars. This is a lot of force for the teeth to withstand. Fractured teeth are seen on a regular basis in dental offices due to clenching.

Many patients do not realize and some refuse to accept the fact that there is a problem. The reason for this is because many, if not most, do not have symptoms. The masticatory system is a very adaptive and forgiving system. This does not mean however that there are not signs of problems, that with intervention, can help prevent problems in the future.

I have been making the NTi appliance for years. It is small, safe, and extremely effective. Just listen to what one of my patients (Dawn A.) has to say about it:

“ Many people, including myself, suffer from more than one type of migraine. Being a parent of three children (one of which has profound special needs) and deciding late in life to return to school, most of my migraines over the past three years are stress related. I usually wake in the morning with a migraine after a night of clenching my teeth, which is evidently my body’s way of dealing with the day’s stress. Waking up too many days in a row tired, with a migraine, and a sore jaw were taking a toll.

Finally, I decided to revisit the issue of a nightguard with Dr. St. Clair since he mentioned it to me several years prior. At the time I couldn’t envision sleeping with anything in my mouth all night, but now I was at the point where I needed some relief since I was taking medication almost daily. My NTi mouth guard is an inch-long piece of acrylic that fits over my bottom front teeth and prevents my back teeth from meeting, and therefore, clenching.

It took a couple of tries to get used to it but now that I am I wouldn’t sleep without it. I am finally free of morning migraines and I feel rested and refreshed when I wake up and better able to face the stressors of my day. My NTi mouth guard has significantly improved the quality of my life and I really wish I had done it sooner!”

Dawn has been a patient of mine for 10 years. There’s no fooling around with Dawn.....she tells it like it is.

Dr. St. Clair maintains a private dental practice in Rowley dedicated to health-centered family dentistry. If there are certain topics you would like to see written about or questions you have please email them to me at jpstclair@dentalhealthforlife.com.

