



Dr Grant McAree

# Ask Dr. Grant



DR GRANT IS A RENOWNED COSMETIC DENTIST, TREATING PATIENTS BOTH NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. HE IS THE ONLY COSMETIC DENTIST IN THE REGION GRANTED PRACTISING PRIVILEGES AT NUFFIELD HOSPITAL, EXETER

## Night mouth guards – what’s the story?

### What are they?

Night guards – also called night or occlusal splints – are removable dental appliances moulded to fit the upper or lower teeth of adults or children. They are mainly used to protect against tooth damage from grinding or clenching at night and/or to stabilise occlusion (the way in which the upper and lower teeth come together when the mouth is closed). The most effective ones are custom-made for your teeth by your dentist.

### Who might need one?

Anyone who grinds their teeth at night ('nocturnal bruxism'), either due to stress, habit, a sleep-related disorder or to smooth down an interference such as a high filling or badly-fitting crown. Some people are unaware they have the habit until they visit their dentist, who can spot signs of grinding-related wear. Also, patients with occlusion-related problems.

### What are the symptoms of night-grinding?

With more extreme cases, excessive tooth wear and chipping along the base of the tooth. Other symptoms may include tiredness following a seemingly good night's sleep, headaches, stiffness or aches in the face, neck or jaw, sensitive teeth and grazed skin on the inside of the mouth or soreness along the edge of the tongue.

### How can a night guard help?

A night guard can not only protect the teeth

and soft tissues but also help to relieve symptoms by helping the jaws to work in a way that reduces the stress on the jaw joints.

### What types are there?

Night guards can be soft or hard, stabilising or repositioning. For children, I only recommend soft ones, as the fit of hard ones changes with normal growth. For adults, I would normally go straight to hard ones, as soft ones tend to wear through more quickly and can become deformed. However, for minor cases or short-term use, adults can wear soft ones, which many patients find more comfortable. Stabilising guards are generally flat against the opposing teeth, helping the jaw muscles to relax as the lower jaw can move freely without teeth interference against the upper jaw, while repositioning ones are used to reposition the jaw to improve occlusion.

### What happens?

Impressions are taken and then a guard is custom made. If irregularities in the

arrangement of the teeth are also aggravating the problem, adjustments can be made, either by reshaping specific teeth or adding a little filling material before taking the impressions. Hard guards may need to be adjusted periodically as the muscles begin to relax over time.

### When should I wear a night guard?

Every night for as long as your dentist recommends or night-grinding persists.

### How long do they last?

It's very difficult to say, as it entirely depends on the severity of the case and length of treatment, but generally at least six months, though more likely a year. It also depends on how well you look after them: rinse after each use and store in the tray case provided to avoid possible damage.

### Any final advice?

Talk to your dentist if you're experiencing any of the above symptoms and are concerned you may be grinding your teeth.

### Costs?

For custom-made children's or adults' ones, £100 for soft, approx £150 for hard. As ever, go for trust and experience, not simply cost. **111**

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