# Oral Appliances for Sleep Apnea

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An oral appliance is a custom-made mouthpiece that gently moves your lower jaw forward while you sleep. This keeps your airway more open and can reduce or stop the pauses in breathing that happen with obstructive sleep apnea (OSA).

## Why this treatment might be a good fit for you

- **You have trouble using a CPAP machine.** This is the most common reason people choose an oral appliance. About half of people who start CPAP stop using it regularly over time. An oral appliance is the main alternative for people in this situation, and fewer people stop using it because of side effects compared to CPAP.
- **You prefer it.** Many people who have tried both CPAP and an oral appliance say they prefer the appliance. Because it's easier to wear every night, it can end up working well in real life even though CPAP does a better job of controlling breathing pauses on paper.
- **You have mild to moderate sleep apnea.** For these cases, some research suggests an oral appliance may work about as well as CPAP in practice. For more severe sleep apnea, an oral appliance is usually considered after CPAP hasn't worked out, though it can still help.
- **Your airway shape is a good match.** Oral appliances work best when the narrowing in your airway is the kind that opens up when your jaw is moved forward. People with milder sleep apnea tend to do especially well.
- **Practical reasons.** If you travel a lot and can't always count on electricity or clean water for a CPAP machine, an oral appliance may be easier to manage.
- **You have other conditions it can also help with.** An oral appliance can help with teeth grinding at night, mouth breathing, and snoring at the same time. It may also be easier to stick with if you have PTSD, feel closed-in (claustrophobic) using a mask, or also have trouble sleeping for other reasons.
- **Used together with CPAP.** In some cases, an oral appliance is used alongside CPAP, especially if mask leaks or high air pressure settings are making CPAP hard to tolerate.

## Who this treatment may not be right for

An oral appliance is usually not the best choice if you have serious heart or lung disease, unhealthy teeth or gums, or severe obesity. In these situations, CPAP is usually the better

option.

**What to expect with the device**

- It should be custom-fitted by a dentist and adjustable, so it can be fine-tuned over time.
- Your dentist will need to check your teeth and bite regularly, since the appliance can gradually shift your teeth or bite over time.
- After you start using it, a follow-up sleep study is needed to confirm it's actually controlling your sleep apnea — feeling better alone isn't enough to know it's working.
- Side effects are usually mild and manageable. These can include extra saliva, sore teeth or jaw, a bite that feels slightly different in the morning, tooth movement, or occasional jaw joint pain.

If you're deciding between an oral appliance and other treatment options, this is something to talk through with your clinician, since the right choice depends on how severe your sleep apnea is, your airway shape, your dental health, and your personal preference.