

Using an oral device to treat OSA

Many people diagnosed with OSA treat their condition by using a CPAP machine. But another common treatment option for mild/moderate OSA is an oral device (also known as a mandibular advancement device, snoring mouthpiece, or snoring mouth guard). These devices are similar to gum shields, and they work by holding your jaw forward during sleep. This helps to keep your airway open, stopping it from collapsing during the night and helping you to breathe easily and quietly.

Studies have shown that an oral device can work just as well as CPAP for mild OSA. But for those suffering with moderate/severe OSA, using a CPAP machine is more effective than an oral device – so it's important to try and comply with CPAP treatment. If you can't tolerate CPAP for enough hours of the night, an oral device could treat your condition more effectively. Many people find oral devices easier to wear than CPAP, making it more likely to be used all night. Others use an oral device to complement their CPAP machine; wearing both simultaneously allows the CPAP to be used at a lower pressure. It's worth noting that for a minority of people, oral devices don't help with OSA at all.

If you already have an OSA diagnosis, you should discuss trying an oral device with your doctor first. The decision should be determined by:

- 1) The number of apnoeas and hypopnoeas you had per hour during your sleep test i.e. your apnoea-hypopnoea index (AHI).
- 2) Whether you suffer from daytime sleepiness.
- 3) How well you get on with using CPAP.

There are many different oral device designs. Most are available without prescription, so you can buy and fit them at home. A popular option is an adjustable boil-and-bite mouthpiece. By immersing it in hot water, and then biting into it, the oral device moulds to the shape of your teeth. Over time, you can adjust the screw mechanism to find the treatment setting needed to reduce your snoring or OSA.

A custom-fit device shares many of the same design features as a boil-and-bite device. However, a custom-fit oral device is made from your dental impressions, and designed to fit your mouth perfectly. Bespoke oral devices are a professional treatment option used by dentists, offering a more discreet and slimmer fit than regular mouthpieces.

Some people try a boil-and-bite oral device as a low-cost test of whether the device helps with their OSA. They then replace it a later date with a custom-fit device.

Richard, 53, used an oral device to treat his snoring after his wife became worried he was suffering from OSA.

"I've snored for many years, much to my wife's despair. My GP suggested that I tried a mandibular device, and after doing some research on oral devices, I eventually came across a custom-fit one that I wanted to try."

Richard decided to try the device for a few nights to see if it helped reduce his snoring.

"After a few days, it almost felt like I had nothing in my mouth. I could move my tongue freely, breathe easily through my mouth and nose, all with very little snoring."

If your sleep apnoea is severe, the best treatment for you will most likely be a CPAP machine. But if you're currently using CPAP, and find it difficult to tolerate, you should speak to your doctor to see what other options are available to treat your OSA.

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