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How To Care For Your Splint - Part 1 of 2

Your splint should be cleaned frequently, especially after it has been worn and will be stored for a period of time. The splint will collect debris, stains and odors if not cleaned properly. Cleaning can be done with your toothbrush and soap and water. Toothpaste is too abrasive for the plastic, and should not be used for cleaning a splint. Soaking it in a diluted bleach solution once a week, or soaking it in an effervescent solution several times a week in addition to the cleaning with a brush will also minimize staining and odors.

When the splint will not be worn for more than a few hours, it should be stored in a moist environment. A sealed zip-lock bag with a little water is adequate to keep the splint from drying out and possibly warping.

Always bring the splint with you to the clinic when you have a follow up appointment.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR SPLINT (DAYTIME WEAR)

1. The splint should work as an excellent reminder to keep the teeth apart and the jaw in a relaxed position. When your teeth touch the plastic of the splint, let that be a reminder that your jaw muscles are becoming tense and you need to relax the jaw, face and neck muscles.
2. When you detect the jaw muscles becoming tense or the opposing teeth touching the splint, sit back in your chair, support the head against the wall or whatever is available and RELAX! Supporting the head makes relaxing the neck muscles easier which in turn, makes relaxing other muscles easier.
3. Remember... jaw muscles are more relaxed when the jaw is open enough to pass a pencil between the upper and lower teeth!
4. When the teeth are together, there is more pressure on the jaw muscles and the joints. This pressure helps to perpetuate the pain and joint damage. When the teeth are apart, the muscles can relax and the joints can heal.
5. Remember, muscles are most likely to become tense with clenching when you are least likely to notice it. For example, when you are concentrating on a mental or physical activity (such as driving or exercise) or during times of stress. Wear of the splint will help you minimize clenching during those times.
6. Unless otherwise directed by your dentist, splints should not be used while eating. However initially, they are more helpful if used as much as possible for faster relief of symptoms. Long term, most patients can reduce daytime wear of their splint but most have to wear it at night indefinitely. At this time, there is no known treatment that will "cure" or eliminate clenching or bruxing completely. Splints help control bruxing, while they are being used.

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How To Care For Your Splint - Part 2 of 2

DAILY CARE FOR TEMPOROMANDIBULAR DISORDERS (TMD)

Success in treatment of temporomandibular disorders is dependent on YOUR daily control of the problem. Others can help, but the primary responsibility for controlling the condition is in your hands. The following suggestions should be followed every day unless otherwise specified by your dentist:

1. **REST THE MUSCLES AND JOINTS.** This will facilitate healing. It includes:
 - **EATING SOFT FOODS:** Avoid crunchy and chewy foods like hard nuts, chips, carrots, tough meat, hard raw vegetables and hard breads. Try baby foods, soups, milkshakes, eggs, jello, etc. When symptoms start to improve, you may eat harder food. However, food should be cut into small bite sized pieces. Do not open the mouth any more than necessary.
 - **NO CHEWING GUM, OR ICE! NO HOLDING OF OBJECTS BETWEEN TEETH!**
2. **AVOID OPENING WIDE.** This protects the joints and muscles from overstretching. It includes:
 - **CONTROLLING YAWNS:** Limit how far you open your mouth by yawning against pressure from your own hand.
 - **AVOID GENERAL ANESTHESIA** (if possible), **AVOID LONG DENTAL APPOINTMENTS**, **REST FREQUENTLY DURING DENTAL APPOINTMENTS.**
3. **MOIST HEAT.** Moist heat usually provides more relief than dry heat.
 - Wet towels with water that is as hot as the skin can stand. Wring one of them out, and wrap it around the back of the neck and up both sides of the face, covering the jaw muscles and temples. **SIT BACK WITH THE HEAD SUPPORTED, LET THE JAW HANG OPEN AND RELAX!!!** Try gentle stretching within limits of pain.
 - Moist heat can be applied several times a day for 5 to 10 minutes each time.
4. **COLD.** Cold is specially helpful for acute injuries (less than 72 hours).
 - A small ice pack may be placed directly over a painful joint for up to 10 minutes.
 - Painful muscle conditions can sometimes be helped by stroking an ice cube over the muscle for 20 seconds followed by warming with moist heat and gentle massage.
5. **MASSAGE THE JAW AND TEMPLE MUSCLES.** This action stimulates circulation, relaxes muscles and decreases soreness.
6. **MAINTAIN GOOD POSTURE.** Avoid a head forward posture which may increase jaw and neck muscle activity and soreness.
7. **HOLD THE PHONE.** Do not cradle the phone; it irritates jaw and neck muscles.
8. **SLEEP ON YOUR SIDE.** Lie on your side with a pillow between your neck and shoulders and a soft support along the face and jaw, or sleep on your back with the neck curve supported.
9. **EXERCISE REGULARLY.** Three to four times a week, for 20 to 30 minute intervals.
10. **PRACTICE STRESS REDUCTION.** Strive to reduce stress in your life.
11. **EAT WELL.** Good nutrition promotes joint and muscle healing.
12. **DISENGAGEMENT OF THE TEETH.** To achieve long lasting relief from TMD problems, is essential that clenching and grinding of teeth be minimized. It is important to learn to keep your teeth apart and jaw relaxed. You must make a conscious effort to separate the teeth and keep the jaw relaxed. You are more likely to clench your teeth when you are under stress, and you may not be aware that you are doing it.
 - Separating the teeth and relaxing the jaw allow the muscles to rest and provides a more normal relationship for the joint itself.
 - **REMEMBER:** The teeth should seldom actually touch, except during chewing and swallowing.
 - Oral habits such as biting cheeks, lips, fingernails, pens or other objects may aggravate the muscles and joints. Eliminating these habits will aid significantly in improving your condition.
 - **REMEMBER:** Controlling your muscle tension and clenching habits is vital to the success of your treatment. The most important part of the treatment is entirely up to you! You are the greatest aid in controlling your problem.