

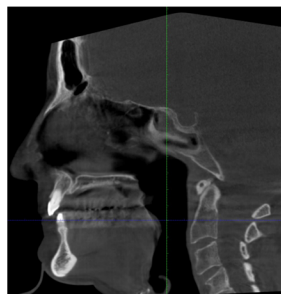
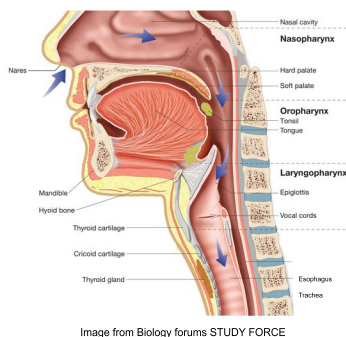
## CAN A NIGHT GUARD BE MORE HARMFUL THAN HELPFUL?

By Dr. Pamela Marzban

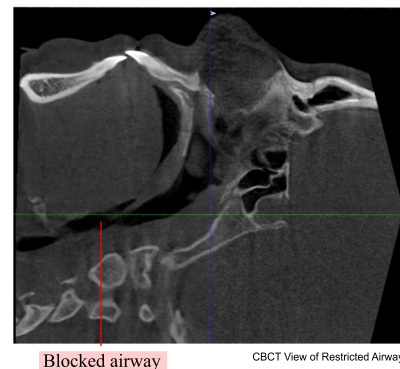
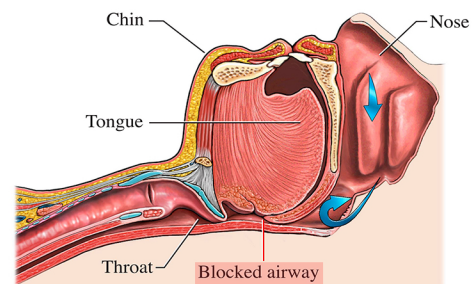
Over 80% of adults in the DC and Northern Virginia area wear some type of night guard or retainer in their mouths while they sleep at night. Night guards can be generic, soft plastic appliances that you can buy over the counter or online that you boil and bite into to fit your mouth. They can also be custom made by a dentist and typically fit on the upper teeth. Regardless of how they are made, their purpose is to protect teeth from clenching and nocturnal bruxism (grinding of teeth).

Let's consider the three most common causes of bruxism: stress, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) medications and sleep disordered breathing (SDB). While night guards can be very helpful with the two first mentioned factors, if a person is bruxing as a side effect from a SDB issue then a night guard can be more harmful than helpful.

We know that humans are supposed to be obligate nasal breathers. The path of air we inspire through our nostrils goes into the nose (nasopharynx), the throat (oropharynx), the larynx, the trachea and then the bronchioles to inflate the lungs. However, if something occludes the nasal passage such as sinus issues, swollen turbinates or adenoid tissue, we bypass the nose and habituate a propensity for mouth breathing. Meaning, if we can't breathe easily through our nose, then we will breathe through the mouth. When the mouth becomes a person's main source to inspire air, the oral anatomy and posture becomes very important to our most critical function to survive. We do not want to occlude this airways space in any way. This is when wearing a night guard can be dangerous.



Imagine a person that is a mouth breather sleeping at night that also happens to be a grinder and wears a night guard. While the guard may be protecting the teeth, the bulk of the appliance is obstructive to the airway. The mere presence of it decreases the space for the tongue thereby cramming the tongue into the throat and this constriction makes the flow of air more difficult. Most mouth breathers are people that suffer from some type of Sleep Disordered Breathing as well. They are often unaware of their condition or undiagnosed. This becomes a true concern when a patient that already doesn't breathe well during sleep, wears an appliance that blocks the oral airway in two ways. This situation can become potentially life threatening.



There are many types of oral appliances out there. To pick the right type of appliance that will bring you the most benefit requires an understanding of physiology and anatomy, accurate testing and diagnosing. It has been my experience with talking with patients for over 20 years that most people don't know what they don't know. They suffer without knowing why and there may be simple solutions. We take this responsibility on for you as this is what we do. We treat bruxism, SDB, OSA and TMJD as we are the Center for Beauty, Balance, and Breath.®

**Dr. Pamela Marzban** is a dentist at the Center for Beauty, Balance, Breath® in Fairfax County. If you have any questions you can call her at [703-323-8200](tel:703-323-8200) or visit her at [www.marzbandds.com](http://www.marzbandds.com).

