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The Occlusal Exercise for Oral Appliance

Patients using mandibular advancement devices for the management of sleep disordered breathing may feel changes for their bite each morning. The front teeth may hit with more force than the back teeth. This is caused by the prolonged shortening of the muscles that provide the ability to push our jaws forward. In the morning those muscles must be stretched out to allow the back teeth to come together properly. Failure to do so could result in a permanent change to your bite. The temporary change may also be due to transient changes in the fluid location and pressures in the joint. It is very important, therefore, to be compliant with this exercise early in the day, every day.

Shortly after removing the appliance, once your jaw muscles have relaxed, slide your jaw forward. Then slide your jaw backwards, in the opposite direction as far as it will go and apply moderate biting pressure until you feel a slight tension up near your ear. This is the proper stretching of the muscle. Continue 15-20 second repetitions, testing your bite recovery throughout the day.

Repeat the procedure with the cuspids and side teeth, moving the lower jaw left, right and open, then biting with jaws aligned, attempting to bring the back teeth together. Again, if they cannot touch properly, a slight rotation of the mandible will stretch the entire muscle. Leaning your chin onto your palm at a table with head facing down, slack-jawed, can also be effective at restoring the bite. Repeat this process later in the day if needed.

If you are unable to recover your bite rapidly and completely each day, discontinue use of the appliance and contact our office. A slower advancement rate may be recommended after normalization of your bite. If you notice any lasting changes in your joint, bite or muscle comfort, discontinue use of the appliance and contact our office.