

When an Apnea Oral Appliance Is Not Working

By

Arthur M. Strauss, DDS

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A useful tool when encountering an obstacle or an unwanted outcome is to wonder why and determine what is happening that may be producing the unwelcome condition.

When an oral appliance does not resolve apnea symptoms, we are faced with a decision as whether to pursue the situation further or “give up”. Our understanding that oral appliance therapy is more than just making and fitting an appliance has to impact this decision. Being or becoming educated about this is what you are doing at this moment.

So, the first question we can ask when an oral appliance does not resolve apnea symptoms, is how and why was this particular oral appliance chosen for your treatment? What other oral appliances were considered? What were their strengths and weaknesses in relationship to your needs?

Oral appliances are not all alike, nor are people. Determining the best match between an oral appliance and each patient and then working to further tailor the fit, design and settings of the appliance to fit and function optimally is referred to as “oral appliance therapy.” Short of this is “making an oral appliance”.

Even if the appliance is resolving the apnea and snoring, is it accomplishing this optimally, with minimal unwanted side effect and maximum comfort? Obstructive sleep apnea oral appliance are designed to function during sleep, where the posture, and muscle tone is different than when awake. Oral appliances are different in:

- Type, tongue retaining devices and mandibular repositioning devices
- Design features
- Materials from which they are made
- How easily and conveniently they can be modified or repaired
- How they are anchored to the teeth
- How much tongue space they provide and even allow
- Whether they can easily change the three dimensional position of the jaws
- Whether they can attain or maintain an ideal jaw position for you
- If they provide the amount and degree of jaw movement you require

Trial procedures involve “sleep testing” both tongue retaining and mandibular repositioning “trial” devices to determine how these differences apply to you. Fitting and follow-up procedures help you maximize the fit and function for success. All of this requires time and expertise.

If your appliance was unsuccessful in resolving your snoring or sleep apnea symptoms or you have not been able to use your appliance because of unmanageable side effects and you just “had an oral appliance made for you” you need not give up this treatment option, you may find success in a more compatible match for you determined and realized through oral appliance therapy.