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Do Sleep Apnea Mouth Guards Work? Pros & Cons of Popular Sleep Aids

Nearly [1 billion people](#) in the world live with obstructive sleep apnea. A common sleep disorder, sleep apnea can be uncomfortable, intrusive, and even life-threatening. Fortunately, many sleep aids — from sleep apnea mouth guards to positional pillows — can help you breathe better at night.



Here's a look at the most common devices and how they work. We've even added a pros and cons list to each sleep apnea sleep aid. Read on to find the best sleep apnea treatment for your lifestyle.

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) Machines

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) therapy is the most common treatment for sleep apnea. Recommended by the [American Academy of Sleep Medicine](#), CPAP therapy is often the first line of defense against sleep apnea.

A [CPAP machine](#) is a device that keeps your airways open while you sleep by providing a set amount of air pressure. The CPAP machine uses a mask placed over your mouth, nose, or both. Air is blown through this mask to keep your airway open and keep it from blocking through the night.

The Pros of CPAP Machines

- **Well-researched:** CPAP machines come with [significant benefits](#). They're considered the gold standard of sleep apnea sleep aids.
- **Better rested:** People who use CPAP machines report having better sleep and more energy.
- **Adjustable features:** CPAP machines have various features to make therapy more approachable.
- **Transparency:** CPAP devices often pair with an app so you can track your sleeping data.

The Cons of CPAP Machines

- **Cost** - CPAP machines can be expensive (up to \$1,000 or more) to buy upfront and require constant upkeep.



- **Commitment** – Using a CPAP machine is a lifestyle commitment that many people find difficult to keep up with. Others might also find the continuous pressure hard to tolerate.
- **Side effects** – The CPAP mask can be uncomfortable or cause symptoms like dry mouth, itchy eyes, and a runny nose.

Adaptive Servo-Ventilation (ASV) Machines

Like CPAP therapy, [adaptive servo-ventilation \(ASV\) machines](#) also treat sleep apnea with positive airway pressure (PAP) therapy. But they don't deliver air pressure in a pre-set way like CPAP machines. Instead, ASV machines provide air pressure dynamically, adjusting to a person's breathing patterns.

ASV devices offer a more personalized experience and are often recommended when a patient has more complex sleeping problems.

The Pros of ASV Machines

- **Personalized experience** – An ASV machine adjusts to the patient's needs on a breath-by-breath basis.
- **More comfortable** – Because of the automatic adjustments, some people find ASV devices more comfortable than CPAP machines.
- **More consistency** – Because people find ASV machines easier to tolerate, they're more likely to use them regularly – consistency is key to managing sleep apnea.

The Cons of ASV Machines

- **Similar to CPAP therapy** – ASV therapy shares many of the same CPAP drawbacks.



- **High price** – ASV machines are generally more expensive than CPAP machines.

Sleep Apnea Mouth Guards

[Sleep apnea oral devices](#) are ideal for people who don't want to use PAP therapy. These mouth guards differ entirely from those used to align teeth or prevent grinding and clenching at night. Instead, these oral devices clear your airway by removing potential blockages.

Sleep apnea oral appliances usually come in one of two forms for adults:

- **Mandibular Advancement Device (MAD)** – These sleep apnea mouth guards help hold the jaw forward to keep the tongue and excess tissue from blocking the airway while you sleep.
- **Tongue Stabilizing Devices (TSD)** – This oral shield helps pull your tongue forward to keep it from blocking your airway. These mouth guards are usually one-size-fits-all devices that use suction to keep the tongue positioned correctly.

The Pros of Sleep Apnea Mouth Guards

- **Effective alternative** – Oral devices are a great alternative for people who have difficulty adapting to PAP therapy.
- **More affordable** – Sleep apnea mouth guards are much more cost-efficient than CPAP and ASV machines.
- **Easy to use** – Sleep apnea oral devices require fewer lifestyle and sleep adjustments. They don't require electricity and can easily be readjusted if needed.



The Cons of Sleep Apnea Mouth Guards

- **Jaw Soreness** – Sleep apnea mouth guards might initially be uncomfortable and cause jaw discomfort.
- **Short lifespan** – Oral devices for sleep apnea typically only last one to three years before they have to be replaced.
- **Symptoms** – If not used properly, sleep apnea mouth guards could worsen symptoms

Nerve Stimulation Devices

A [hypoglossal nerve stimulator](#) (HGNS) is a small device, about the size of a pacemaker, that can be surgically implanted into your chest. It works via a small remote that can be turned on and off before and after you go to sleep. Nerve stimulation devices help decrease sleep apnea symptoms by monitoring your breathing patterns. When needed, it sends signals to the nerves that control your tongue and chest muscles, keeping your airway open while you sleep.

The Pros of Nerve Stimulators

- **PAP alternative** – Nerve stimulators are best for people who have tried CPAP machines without success or who can't tolerate CPAP therapy.
- **Controllable** – The device is easily turned on/off via a remote control.
- **Automatic** – Nerve stimulators automatically respond to your breathing and help clear your airway when needed.
- **Effective** – [Studies have shown](#) that nerve stimulators are safe and effective for treating obstructive sleep apnea.

The Cons of Nerve Stimulators

- **Minimally invasive** – Nerve stimulators must be implanted via a minimally invasive surgical procedure.



- **Very expensive** – These devices and the required surgery can cost between \$30,000 to \$40,000 before insurance.
- **Excludes pregnancy** – Nerve stimulators are not recommended for people who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

Positional Pillows

For a more natural and less invasive approach, [positional therapy](#) can also help sleep apnea symptoms. And while CPAP therapy may garner more results, patients seem to tolerate positional therapy better and are more likely to [adhere to the treatment](#). Positional therapy can also be combined with CPAP therapy for optimal results.

Sleeping on your back can cause structures in your airway to relax and obstruct your airflow, making breathing challenging or impossible. Positional therapy works by using specialized sleep apnea pillows or wedges that keep you from turning on your back while you sleep and, ultimately, reduce your number of sleep apnea episodes.

[Wedge pillows](#), specifically, elevate your lower body and help eliminate some of the gravitational pressure on your airway when lying on your back. These sleep apnea sleep aids can also help reduce [acid reflux](#) and [shoulder pain](#).

A quality [full-body pillow](#) can also position your body in a way that helps prevent your tongue from blocking your airway.

The Pros of Positional Pillows

- **Less invasive** – Positional pillows are the least invasive sleep apnea sleep aid on our list. As a result, patients are more likely to adhere to and keep up with the treatment.
- **Customizable** – Many positional pillows offer multiple configurations for your individual sleeping needs.
- **Affordable** – Positional pillows are generally inexpensive, especially compared to other sleep apnea sleep aids. They also don't require a prescription.



- **Added benefits** – Positional therapy can also help your skeletal alignment and alleviate other health issues like acid reflux and shoulder pain.

The Cons of Positional Pillows

- **Not as effective as CPAP** – While not as effective as CPAP therapy, positional pillows can be combined with CPAP machines for maximum results.
- **Limited** – Positional therapy doesn't treat patients whose airway is blocked by excessive tissue.

MedCline Sleep Apnea Relief System

Sleep Apnea Oral Appliance FAQs

Do Mouthpieces for Sleep Apnea Work?

Mouthpieces, or oral appliances, can be effective for treating obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), the most prevalent type of sleep disorder. However, their effectiveness for central sleep apnea (CSA), a less common condition resulting from the brain's failure to signal properly, is more complex and less certain.

What Is Better for Sleep Apnea CPAP or Mouthpiece?

Typically, continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy is considered the safest and most effective treatment for both obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) and the more complex central sleep apnea (CSA). However, if CPAP isn't suitable for you, other alternatives like the FDA-approved Inspire Upper Airway Stimulation implant, or a custom-fitted mouthpiece, could be discussed with healthcare professionals.

What Are the Side Effects of the Mouthpiece for Sleep Apnea?

While oral appliances can effectively reduce obstructive sleep apnea symptoms, they may also cause adverse effects. These can include changes in tooth alignment,



discomfort in the jaw or teeth, and excessive saliva production, which may lead some patients to discontinue treatment.

Can a Mouth Guard Replace CPAP?

Both CPAP and mouth guards aim to keep your airway open while you sleep. CPAP achieves this with a pressurized air stream, while a mouth guard adjusts your jaw to clear the airway. Many patients choose a sleep mouth guard over CPAP to alleviate their sleep apnea symptoms and ensure a restful night's sleep.

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