Documenting Occlusal Guards with Hard and Soft Components

This guide's purpose is to address reporting of an occlusal guard that has attributes of both a hard and a soft appliance.

The three CDT codes are intended to provide specificity and eliminate the need to prepare and submit a supporting claim narrative.

D9944 **occlusal guard – hard appliance, full arch**
D9945 **occlusal guard – soft appliance, full arch**
D9946 **occlusal guard – hard appliance, partial arch**

The ADA has clarified that an appliance containing both hard and soft components would be properly documented and reported as a hard appliance (e.g., D9944 or D9946).

Although the full entries for the above codes do not provide such definitive guidance within their nomenclatures or descriptors, the basis for reporting is that the operative part of a guard is the occlusal surface, and the key determinant of reporting a hard vs. soft appliance is the material that contacts the occlusal surface.

- A hard guard has an articulated occlusal surface that has a different therapeutic effect than a soft guard.

- A combination hard and soft only makes the operative (hard) part of the guard, the occlusal surface, more comfortable, but doesn't change the substantive effect, fabrication and use of the guard.

Therefore, full, or partial arch guards that have any hard occlusal component, regardless of whether or not they have a soft component in addition, should be coded as a hard appliance – either code D9944 for a full arch appliance or D9946 for a partial arch appliance.

Questions or Assistance?

Call 800-621-8099 or send an email to dentalcode@ada.org.

Notes:
• This document includes content from the ADA publication – *Current Dental Terminology (CDT) manual* ©2024.