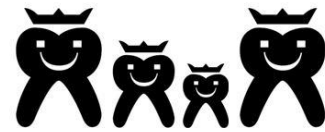


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TOOTH GRINDING (BRUXISM)

WHAT IS BRUXISM?

Bruxism is an excessive clenching or grinding of the teeth that is not part of normal chewing movement. It can lead to excessive wear on teeth and may cause permanent damage to teeth and the jaw joints

Extreme clenching and grinding are not normal or healthy actions of the jaws. In some adults and children, clenching and grinding may occur during the day and/or night. Individuals typically have no conscious control over this clenching and grinding, particularly when it occurs during sleep.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF BRUXISM?

The causes of bruxism are still being studied. A combination of physical and psychological factors is believed to contribute to it:

- **Physical stress** such as illness, nutritional deficiencies or dehydration, particularly in children
- **Psychological stress**, anxiety and tension
- **Abnormal anatomy** of the teeth or jaws (including 'high spots' on fillings) that can cause improper occlusion (also called 'bite') and lead to bruxism behaviour.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS?

These vary according to the nature, frequency, duration and strength of excessive clenching and grinding. Signs and symptoms can include:

• **INTENSE CLENCHING OF TEETH WHILE ASLEEP**

This is the most common symptom of bruxism. Most people are unaware that they grind or clench their teeth as it is often done whilst

sleeping. It can also be done without realisation through the day generally when concentrating.

• **FLATTENED, WORN DOWN, AND CHIPPED TEETH**

When bruxing, it is generally the teeth that sustain the most obvious damage. Running your tongue around your teeth regularly will assist in recognising any unexpected changes in the mouth. Generalised thinning of tooth enamel should also be regularly checked by your dentist.

• **GENERALLY SENSITIVE TEETH**

More than half the people who grind their teeth suffer from generalised sensitivity that is not necessarily specific to one tooth or area. Reactions to temperature and biting can be felt in both the teeth and the gums.

• **TENDERNESS AND ACHING IN THE JAW**

Although most damage is to the teeth, there is often significant pain from the jaw (Temporomandibular Joint or TMJ) and the surrounding muscles. Because of the significant pressure that is able to be applied through the TMJ it is possible to strain the muscles leaving them feeling bruised and tender.

• **HEAD, NECK, FACE AND EAR PAIN**

Many of the muscles, ligaments, and tendons in the jaw, neck and head area are interconnected, there is immense pressure placed on these through the TMJ when grinding. It is common for all or any of these to ache or be painful and is directly related to grinding but not always obvious

• **DAMAGED MOUTH AND CHEEK TISSUE**

When the soft tissues in the mouth (tongue, cheeks and gums) suffer trauma it is normally

done consciously, i.e. a burn or chewing on a foreign body as it causes immediate pain. The cheeks or tongue are most commonly damaged tissues in the mouth when grinding. Whilst sleeping, the head is normally sideways and the cheek or tongue relaxes and sits between the teeth, when the teeth are clenched together significant damage can occur.

WHY IS BRUXISM HARMFUL?

In some cases, chronic teeth grinding can result in fractures, nerve damage of the teeth and jaw, ligament and bone damage causing teeth to become loose. Bruxing will slowly wear down teeth potentially to gum level.

Not only can severe grinding damage teeth and result in tooth loss, it can also permanently affect the jaws, wearing the TMJ away and potentially resulting in hearing loss.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO STOP GRINDING?

An occlusal splint is a custom made guard (usually made from rubber) that is moulded over the upper or lower teeth.



When worn at night, it prevents any contact between the teeth, and also cushions them decreasing the amount of pressure that is able to be applied to the teeth.

Stress is a major contributor to developing a bruxing habit. Addressing the causes of stress is vital and attending counseling or starting an exercise program may be beneficial. Consultation with a doctor is recommended as stress can lead to medical conditions that require treatment.

TIPS TO PREVENTING TEETH GRINDING

- Minimising food and drink that contain caffeine such as cola, chocolate, and coffee.
- Avoiding alcohol. Grinding tends to intensify after alcohol consumption.
- Avoiding chewing anything that is not food including chewing gum, pencils, fingernails etc. This allows the jaw muscle to get more used to clenching and makes you more likely to grind your teeth.
- Be more conscious of what your teeth are doing especially when concentrating. If you notice that you clench or grind during the day, position the tip of your tongue between your teeth. This trains your jaw muscles to relax and prevents unconscious clenching.
- Relax your jaw muscles at night before bedtime by holding a warm washcloth or heat pack against your cheek in front of your earlobe.

REFERRAL TO A SPECIALIST

If the pain and damage inflicted is severe and chronic and the conservative treatment (occlusal splint) has not been effective in relieving symptoms and restoring jaw function, your dentist may refer you to an Oral Medicine or TMJ Specialist for more in-depth examination and treatment.

The information contained in this leaflet is only a summary of grinding and clenching and does not contain all the facts available so should therefore only be used as a guide. It does not replace personal discussion with your dentist. Please consult your dentist with any questions you may have.

For appointments please call:

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