

Bruxism (Tooth Grinding)

Bruxism is the habit of clenching, gnashing or grinding your teeth. Your teeth are not meant to be clenched and in contact all the time. They should only briefly touch each other when you swallow or chew. If they are in contact too often or too forcefully, it can wear down the tooth enamel.

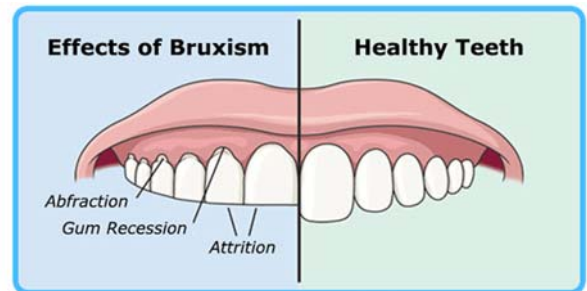


What causes tooth grinding and why does it occur?

We don't completely understand what causes bruxism. Possible physical or psychological causes may include:

- Emotions, such as anxiety, stress, anger, frustration or tension
- Abnormal alignment of upper and lower teeth (malocclusion)
- Other sleep problems, such as sleep apnoea
- Response to pain from an earache or teething (in children)
- An uncommon side effect of some medications, such as antidepressants
- Complication resulting from a disorder such as Huntington's disease or Parkinson's disease

We tend to find tooth grinding is mostly associated with stress, younger age and can increase with the use of tobacco, caffeine or alcohol.



How Do I Find Out if I Grind My Teeth?

Because grinding often occurs during sleep, most people are unaware that they grind their teeth. However, a dull, constant headache or sore jaw when you wake up is a tell-tale symptom of bruxism. Many times people learn that they grind their teeth by their loved one who hears the grinding at night.

Signs and symptoms of bruxism may include:

- Teeth grinding or clenching, which may be loud enough to awaken your sleep partner
- Teeth that are flattened, fractured, chipped or loose
- Worn tooth enamel, exposing the deeper dentine and pulpal layers of your tooth
- Increased tooth sensitivity
- Jaw or face pain or soreness
- Tired or tight jaw muscles
- Pain that feels like an earache, though it's actually not a problem with your ear
- Dull headache originating in the temples
- Damage from chewing on the inside of your cheek
- Indentations on your tongue

The biggest sign of bruxism is toothwear which results in shortening and chipping of the front teeth along with exposure of the softer dentine layer.

Why is teeth grinding harmful?

In some cases, chronic teeth grinding can result in a fracturing, loosening, or loss of teeth. The chronic grinding may wear teeth down to stumps and cause the loss of existing fillings which have been placed.

Not only can severe grinding damage teeth and result in tooth loss, it can also affect your jaws, cause or worsen jaw joint issues, and even change the appearance of your face by shortening your teeth and deepening your bite.

- Relax your jaw muscles at night by holding a warm washcloth against your cheek in front of your earlobe.



Once tooth wear becomes moderate or excessive, restorations are typically needed to prevent further shortening of the teeth and deepening of the bite.

What Can I Do to Stop Grinding My Teeth?

The typical solution to tooth grinding, particularly at night when it is uncontrolled, is to be fitted with a custom splint. A custom splint will protect your teeth from grinding during sleep.

If stress is causing you to grind your teeth, ask your doctor or dentist about options to reduce your stress. Attending stress counselling, starting an exercise program, seeing a physical therapist, or obtaining a prescription for muscle relaxants are among some of the options that may be offered.

If a sleeping disorder is causing the grinding, treating it may reduce or eliminate the grinding habit.

Other tips to help you stop teeth grinding include:

- Avoid or cut back on foods and drinks that contain caffeine, such as colas, chocolate, and coffee.
- Avoid alcohol. Grinding tends to intensify after alcohol consumption.
- Do not chew on pencils or pens or anything that is not food. Avoid chewing gum as it allows your jaw muscles to get more used to clenching and makes you more likely to grind your teeth.
- Train yourself not to clench or grind your teeth. If you notice that you clench or grind during the day, position the tip of your tongue between your teeth. This practice trains your jaw muscles to relax.



Custom fitted splints protect your teeth from unconscious night time grinding. It is always easier and cheaper to replace a splint than to repair teeth afflicted by tooth wear