

TOOTH GRINDING

(Bruxism)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

The habit of grinding or clenching the teeth. Bruxism is the medical term for the problem. Tooth grinding is often done while asleep, but grinding or tapping teeth during the day is also common. Continual tooth grinding may erode gums and supporting bones in the mouth.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain in the jaw muscles. Earaches may occur also.
- Clenching of the jaw, or clicking noises in the jaw.
- Annoying, tooth grinding noises at night. These may be loud enough to awaken others.
- Teeth may become loose and more sensitive to cold and heat.
- Damage to teeth, supporting gums, and bone (a dentist will notice the changes in a dental exam).
- Headaches.
- Daytime sleepiness.

CAUSES

- There is no one specific cause. Anxiety, tension, and stress appear to play a role.
- Unconscious attempt to correct an abnormal "bite."
- Tooth grinding occurs in children. They may grind their teeth when they have a cold, ear ache, allergies, or other problems. The children usually outgrow the habit, and it typically causes no damage to the teeth.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- One study found that it occurs more often in people who drink alcohol at bedtime, drink more than 6 cups of coffee a day, smoked cigarettes, or suffered from depression and/or anxiety.
- Suppressed anger may be a risk factor.
- Some antidepressant or antipsychotic drugs may increase the risk.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Avoid stressful situations if possible.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Treatment can help relieve the symptoms and limit any further damage to the teeth or other complications.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Without treatment, teeth, bones, and gums may erode or crack from the pressure of grinding.
- Problems with the temporomandibular joint. This is the hinge-like area where your upper jaw connects to the lower jaw.
- Continued problems with disrupted sleep.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Self-treatment options may sometimes help.
 - Cut down on alcohol and caffeine.
 - Try taking a warm bath before bedtime.
 - Use a warm washcloth to apply heat to the jaw area.
 - Decrease the stress in your life, where possible.
 - Have your spouse wake you at night when you grind your teeth. Then get up and do some simple activity for about 10 minutes before you go back to sleep.
- See your dentist if self-help measures aren't working. Your dentist will examine your teeth and the jaw areas of your face. Several treatment options may be discussed.
 - Dental work can help resolve certain problems such as an abnormal bite, crooked or missing teeth.
 - A night guard may be prescribed. This is a custom-made plastic device worn at night to stop upper and lower teeth from coming together.
 - Your dentist may suggest a sound alarm device. It is worn at night and sounds an alarm to wake you when it senses jaw movements.
 - Biofeedback training (relaxation exercises) or counseling to learn ways to cope more effectively with stress may be needed.
 - Physical therapy, hypnosis therapy, or discontinuing drugs that are a risk factor may help some patients.

MEDICATIONS

Your health care provider or dentist may prescribe drugs for a short period for certain problems. These include muscle relaxants or mild sleeping aids.

ACTIVITY

No limits.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member grinds teeth at night. It is also a good idea to call your dentist.
- Once treatment begins, call your dentist if you have new symptoms or if other symptoms become worse.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page