

TEETH GRINDING AND CLENCHING (BRUXISM)

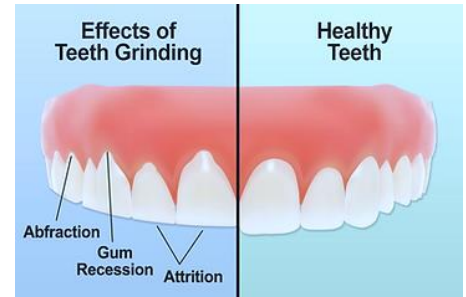


About teeth grinding

Bruxism is the involuntary clenching and/or grinding of teeth. More than three quarters of the population suffer from bruxism at some point in their life. It is more prevalent during sleep but can occur while you are awake.

Often people do not realise that they are grinding their teeth while sleeping, and a partner hearing the crunching noise at night may alert them to the problem. Parents commonly hear it in their sleeping children.

Teeth grinding is often a result of stress but can also be caused by anxiety, alcohol, smoking, caffeine, snoring, sleep apnea and medications.



Signs and symptoms of teeth grinding

Symptoms (things you feel)

- Tension headaches
- Ear and/or jaw joint pain
- Achy teeth
- Aching/stiffness of the face and neck muscles
- Difficulty eating due jaw joint discomfort
- Clenching when angry, anxious or concentrating
- Sensitive teeth
- Cracked, chipped and wearing teeth
- Tender areas on the tongue and inside of cheeks

Signs (things dentists detect)

- Cracked/broken teeth or fillings
- Sensitive teeth to hot and cold
- Crack lines in teeth
- Chipped fillings/teeth
- Above average wear and tear on teeth
- Jaw joint displacements
- Sore jaw muscles
- Enlargement of the jaw muscles
- Bite marks on the tongue and inside of cheeks

Treatment for teeth grinding

The causes of bruxism are often complicated. This makes it difficult to treat, and requires a multifactorial approach.

Behaviour modification and diet

Firstly try to improve sleep hygiene by reducing alcohol, nicotine and caffeine. This also helps with stress and anxiety.

It is important to be mindful of how you use your jaw, especially if it feels sore. Try to avoid wide mouth opening while eating and yawning. Avoidance of certain foods (such as chewy or hard/crunchy foods) will allow some rest for the muscles that are causing discomfort. Daytime awareness of bruxism is very helpful as you can actively relax your mouth and jaw if you catch yourself clenching and grinding during the day. By not overusing the jaw muscles you give them an opportunity to rest and alleviate some of the symptoms. These changes to your diet and lifestyle will in turn give you a better chance at managing your bruxism.

If there is any pain in the jaw or surrounding muscles, you can treat this as you would for any muscular pain. Apply gentle heat for 15 minutes on the area, take anti-inflammatory medication (ibuprofen) and massage the area gently. Exercises can also be used to help gently stretch the muscles, which can be shown to you by your dentist.

Stress management

Being aware of stress triggers and how to manage them is key to managing your bruxism. These may include stress reduction methods such as regular exercise, relaxation techniques and good sleep hygiene, which can all help reduce your risk of bruxism as well as improve your overall health and wellbeing.

Occlusal splint therapy

The most common way to protect your teeth from further damage is an occlusal splint. This is a removable appliance that you wear while sleeping especially during times of stress. Occlusal splints can also be called nightguards, splints, sleep guards or night mouthguards. Occlusal splints not only protect your teeth from further damage but can also reduce muscle discomfort associated with bruxism.

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Nightguard and occlusal splint

Nightguards do not prevent bruxism but offer a protective layer that cushions your teeth against the wear and tear that results from grinding or clenching. Wearing a nightguard on a regular basis reduces tooth damage, minimises jaw muscular aches and headaches, and can promote more restful sleep.

Adjusting to your nightguard will take time

It will likely take a few weeks for you to adjust to wearing a nightguard. At the beginning it is likely to feel uncomfortable, however you will adjust to it over time. One trick that may help you adjust to wearing your nightguard is to put it in for short periods of time during the day. Wearing the nightguard for short intervals as you go about your daily routine eases you into using it for longer periods of sleeping.

While it might feel uncomfortable at first to sleep with your nightguard, it is important to persevere. Wearing a nightguard can protect your oral health for years to come, so it is well worth learning how to use one properly and committing to its regular use.

It is important to keep your nightguard clean

- Rinse your nightguard with cold water after every use. This will remove any debris on your nightguard.
- After rinsing, lightly brush the nightguard with your toothbrush. There is no need to use toothpaste as it can be too abrasive.
- Let your nightguard dry completely before sealing it in its case. After rinsing and brushing the nightguard, set it in a clean area until it is fully dry. Only then should you seal your case. Storing and sealing a damp nightguard in the case will promote bacterial growth.
- Make sure you keep the case clean. Hand wash the case in warm soapy water regularly.
- You can use a sonic cleaner with a retainer cleaner tablet to reinforce the cleaning of your nightguard.

Bringing your nightguard to your dental appointments provides your dentist with an opportunity to make sure your nightguard is still in working order. It will be inspected for signs of wear and tear, and to double check the nightguard is functioning correctly.

Do you have to wear a nightguard forever?

The answer to that question depends on you, your circumstances, and your anatomy. Knowing when it might be safe to ditch your nightguard and why you needed the nightguard in the first place can help you decide what is right for you. You need to be sure that the grinding and clenching have stopped.

The signs of bruxism can be subtle. Attending your regular check-ups allows your teeth to be assessed to see if tooth grinding is still a problem. If we do not see signs of active grinding but your life is particularly stressful, your dentist may tell you to keep wearing your nightguard. Remember, stress and anxiety are strongly associated with bruxism.

Nightguards are worn to protect your oral health from the destructive impacts of bruxism, so it is essential you wear your nightguard as long as teeth grinding and jaw clenching continue. For some people, that may mean wearing a nightguard for a few months or years when life is especially stressful. For others, a nightguard might be a lifelong companion that they have to wear forever.

Patient's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____p