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Do You Grind Your Teeth?

By Dr. Jocelyne Charest

Teeth grinding, also known as bruxism, is the subconscious clenching and grinding of teeth, which mostly occurs during sleep. Many clinical studies indicate that over 90% of the population has suffered from teeth grinding at times of stress but that in most cases, the condition is short-lived and does not lead to detrimental long-term effects.

However, that is not the case for chronic sufferers, most of which are unaware of their condition until it is diagnosed during their dental check-up or alerted to by a partner. This condition can affect both adults and children. In the USA for instance, bruxism affects an estimated 30 to 40 million children and adults. In both children and adults, tooth damage related to bruxism can be prevented

Bruxism and its effects

Some people grind their teeth only when sleeping; this condition is called "nocturnal bruxism" or "sleep-related bruxism". Others grind their teeth during the daytime as well, most often during situations that make them feel tense or anxious. People with severe bruxism can fracture dental fillings or cause other types of tooth damage. Severe teeth grinding has also been blamed for cases of temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMD), morning headaches and unexplained facial pain.

If left untreated, people suffering from bruxism will continue to wear their natural teeth down, causing a loss of proper dental function, tooth sensitivity, broken dental fillings, and damage to the jaw joint (TMJ). When sleeping, the biting force (the force at which the upper and lower jaws clench together) can be up to six times greater than

when you are awake – which explains the extent and severity of the potential damage caused by bruxism. And yet, statistics indicate that only 5% of those suffering from bruxism will develop symptoms severe enough to prompt them to seek treatment.

Causes and treatments

Bruxism can have a variety of psychological and physical causes. In many cases, it has been linked to stress. However, teeth grinding can also be the body's reaction to the teeth not being aligned properly, or a poor bite (the way the teeth come together).

If it is related to stress, cutting down on stimulants such as caffeine and tobacco may help. You may also want to seek advice on how to integrate various strategies in your lifestyle to help you relax. In some cases, professional counseling is advised.

The most common fix proposed by dentists for people affected by night grinding is a night guard, which is an oral appliance that prevents the teeth along their upper gums and lower gums from touching – hence protecting the teeth from wear damage. However, this only answers one part of the dilemma that night grinding and clenching poses.

Get the best treatment with a Neuromuscular Dentist

The discipline of neuromuscular dentistry examines the entire jaw and dental system as a whole, taking the muscles, tendons, and skeletal structure into account when considering steps to take for treatment. Therefore, a custom-made night guard designed by a neuromuscular dentist will not only absorb the biting force while you are sleeping and prevent further damage to your tooth enamel, gums and soft tissue during sleep, it also moves your teeth and jaw to their correct position so your muscles can relax.

If bruxism is related to dental problems, there may be the need to correct tooth alignment and/or jaw position. In such cases, it is recommended to seek the help of a neuromuscular dentist, who specialises in treating patients suffering from tense facial muscles and misalignment of the jaw. In some cases, the use of crowns might be needed to entirely reshape the biting surface of the teeth, allowing the jaw muscles to realign, thus correcting the bite for a long term solution.

Therefore, if on waking, you are experiencing tightening or pain in the jaw muscles, or dull headaches, or if you suffer from premature wearing of your natural teeth, broken fillings, injured gums, or grinding sounds while sleep

About Dr. Jocelyne Charest

Dr. Jocelyne Charest is a certified neuromuscular dentist at the German Dental & Neuromuscular Clinic. She has many years of experience successfully treating patients suffering from teeth grinding.

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