



Important Things to Know About Bruxism (Teeth Grinding)

- Bruxism is the habit of grinding and clenching the teeth.
- It may occur while awake or when asleep.
- Some people will grind or clench their teeth more when they are stressed, have to concentrate or are unwell.
- It can also be caused by excessive alcohol and drug use.
- Most people do not know that they grind their teeth while sleeping.
- If you think that you may have dental problems due to grinding your teeth, you should see your dentist for an assessment.
- Treatment possibilities include a grinding mouthguard and behavioural or relaxation techniques.
- Sleep bruxism is a sleep disorder. It may occur along with other sleep disorders and you might need to see a sleep physician.

What is bruxism?

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. This is the outer layer that covers each tooth. Without this to protect the inner parts of your teeth, you may have dental problems. Clenching or grinding your teeth regularly can also lead to pain in the jaw or in the muscles of the face. Bruxism happens during sleep, but some people also suffer from this when awake.

Who has bruxism?

It is thought that about half of the community grinds their teeth from time to time. But it may be serious in only about 1 in 20 cases. About 30% of children grind or clench their teeth. Most children grow out of this and suffer no lasting effects to their adult teeth.

How do I know if I have it?

You may not know that you grind your teeth while you are asleep. A bed partner may be the first person to notice grinding sounds and noises. Other clues may be morning symptoms of a dull headache, jaw muscles that

hurt or are tight, trouble opening the mouth wide, long lasting pain in the face, damage to the teeth and broken dental fillings.

Your dentist can help to work out if you have bruxism. You will be asked a series of questions and your overall dental health will be checked. This may include looking for any wear and damage to your teeth, checking the muscles in and around your jaw and the function of the jaw joints, which are just in front of your ears. They may need to look at changes to your teeth and mouth over a number of visits to work out whether the cause is bruxism.

To be sure that you suffer from sleep bruxism, a [sleep study](#) may be needed. This will show how much you move your jaw while asleep. A sleep study looking for bruxism by itself is not common, but it may uncover other sleep problems.

What causes it?

There are many reasons for bruxism such as emotional stress (e.g. anger and anxiety), drug use (e.g. stimulants), having to concentrate hard, illness, not having enough water in your body, the wrong diet, sleep problems, teething (in babies), bad tooth alignment and problems with dental work. Some people can also get bruxism as a side effect of antidepressants. If you let your doctor know of this side effect, you may be changed to a different drug.

How is bruxism treated?

There are many treatments available for bruxism, including relaxation and awareness techniques. Counselling may help to relieve stress in your life. Improving the quality of your sleep can be of benefit. This may include reducing the use of stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine, having enough sleep, making sure you have a good bedtime routine and relaxing before bed. Treating sleep apnoea in some people may also help to control sleep bruxism.

There are no medications that will stop sleep bruxism. A grinding mouthguard can be made. This is like a sports mouthguard, but harder. It will help protect the teeth, muscles and jaw joint from the pressure of clenching and grinding. It will not stop bruxism and in some cases can make the actual grinding worse, but it will lessen the damage to your teeth.

Can it get worse?

Many cases of bruxism are mild and cause little harm. If so, the person usually does not know that they are grinding their teeth. But more serious cases may damage the teeth and result in facial pain and poor sleep. Nightly sounds can also wake other people sleeping nearby (e.g. roommates and sleeping partners). If you know that you have this problem, then you should take action to prevent any serious consequences.

Where can I find out more?

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BruXism>

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A national organisation devoted to education, advocacy and supporting research into sleep and its disorders

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A voluntary group offering assistance and support to people and their families living with sleep disorders

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The peak national association of clinicians and scientists devoted to investigation of sleep and its disorders

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Ongoing concerns about sleep or other medical conditions should be discussed with your local doctor.

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