

Teeth grinding

Teeth grinding is such a common condition, it even has a name: bruxism.

Many people grind or clench their teeth while they're asleep or during times of stress. And they're often not aware of it.

Perhaps your partner has brought your grinding to your attention. Or maybe your children grind their teeth-the sound can often be heard beyond the bedroom.

Of course, the grinding and clenching of the teeth are part of the normal eating process. However, bruxism can lead to all sorts of problems-in addition to irritating partners and parents:

- worn-down or loose teeth
- sore or enlarged jaw muscles
- damaged jaw joints
- cracked teeth
- broken fillings
- ear and hearing problems
- headaches.

What causes it?

In some cases, teeth grinding begins with an incorrect bite or jaw alignment. It's often triggered by a stressful event, such as a new job, a new school, exams, money worries or relationship problems. Once established, the habit may come into play whenever you're stressed or tired.

How to treat it

If the condition is stress-related, it may go away of its own accord as you adjust to the situation.

If, however, there is an established pattern of teeth grinding, it is advisable to have the problem investigated and treated.

Evening out the bite

Ideally, the upper and lower teeth should meet together evenly and comfortably. If the bite is uneven, the jaw and chewing muscles may try to grind the teeth into a comfortable position.

Simply smoothing down the protruding teeth or fillings may be all that's required to rectify the problem.

Wearing a bite splint

The side effects of teeth grinding can be effectively avoided by wearing a bite splint. Generally worn at night, the appliance places a barrier between the upper and lower teeth. This protects against wear and relieves the soreness in the jaw and chewing muscles.

The easy to wear device is generally made to fit the upper teeth. It is moulded to the precise shape and contours of your own teeth and mouth. The biting surface of the splint is smooth so that the opposing teeth can slide over it harmlessly, without gritting or grinding.

Taking it easy

Of course, one of the best ways to address the problem of teeth grinding is to learn how to relax.

Regular exercise, such as walking, builds up your stress-resistance. Activities such as yoga, meditation, tai chi, or simply taking regular time out, may also be helpful.

See also ...

- Bite splints
- Neuromuscular dentistry