



Tooth Grinding (Bruxism)

Understanding Bruxism and How to Protect Your Teeth

What Is Bruxism?

Bruxism is the medical term for grinding or clenching your teeth. It may occur during the day (awake bruxism) or while sleeping (sleep bruxism).

Many people are unaware that they grind their teeth, especially during sleep. Over time, bruxism can wear down teeth, cause jaw discomfort, and contribute to other oral health problems.

Early diagnosis and treatment can help prevent long-term damage.

What Causes Bruxism?

The exact cause of bruxism is not always known.

Several factors may contribute, including:

- Stress and anxiety
- Sleep disorders
- Certain medications
- Misaligned teeth (in some cases)
- Caffeine or alcohol consumption
- Tobacco use
- Neurological conditions

Often, more than one factor is involved.

Signs and Symptoms

Many people discover they grind their teeth only after a dentist notices signs of wear.

Common symptoms include:

- Flattened or worn teeth
- Chipped or cracked teeth
- Tooth sensitivity
- Jaw pain or tightness
- Morning headaches
- Ear pain without an ear infection
- Facial muscle soreness
- Clicking or popping of the jaw
- Interrupted sleep (reported by a bed partner)

Symptoms may range from mild to severe.

How Does Bruxism Affect Your Teeth?

Repeated grinding places excessive force on the teeth.

Over time, this may lead to:

- Enamel wear
- Tooth fractures
- Cracked fillings
- Broken crowns
- Increased tooth sensitivity
- Damage to dental implants or restorations

Severe untreated bruxism can significantly shorten the lifespan of natural teeth and dental restorations.

How Does Bruxism Affect the Jaw?

Bruxism may strain the muscles and joints used for chewing.

Some people experience:

- Jaw fatigue
- Difficulty opening the mouth fully
- Facial pain
- Tender chewing muscles

Bruxism may also contribute to symptoms involving the temporomandibular joints (TMJs), although not everyone with bruxism develops TMJ disorders.

How Is Bruxism Diagnosed?

Your dentist may identify bruxism by looking for:

- Tooth wear
- Cracks or fractures
- Worn fillings
- Enlarged jaw muscles
- Tender chewing muscles
- Changes in your bite

Your dentist may also ask about:

- Morning headaches
- Jaw discomfort
- Sleep quality
- Stress levels

In some cases, additional evaluation by a physician or sleep specialist may be recommended.

How Is Bruxism Treated?

Treatment depends on the cause and severity.

Night Guards

A **custom-made night guard** is one of the most common treatments.

It helps:

- Protect teeth from further wear
- Reduce stress on restorations
- Cushion the effects of grinding

A night guard does **not** cure bruxism but helps reduce its damaging effects.

Stress Management

For some people, reducing stress may decrease awake bruxism.

Helpful strategies may include:

- Regular exercise
 - Relaxation techniques
 - Good sleep habits
 - Mindfulness practices
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Managing Contributing Factors

Your healthcare provider may recommend addressing:

- Sleep disorders
- Certain medications
- Lifestyle habits such as excessive caffeine or alcohol consumption

Treatment varies depending on the individual.

Can Bruxism Be Prevented?

Not always.

However, you can reduce your risk of complications by:

- Wearing a night guard if recommended
 - Attending regular dental examinations
 - Limiting excessive caffeine before bedtime
 - Avoiding tobacco
 - Practicing healthy sleep habits
 - Managing stress
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When Should You See a Dentist?

Schedule an appointment if you notice:

- Worn or chipped teeth
- Jaw pain
- Frequent headaches upon waking
- Tooth sensitivity
- Clicking or locking of the jaw
- Your sleep partner reports grinding noises during sleep

Early evaluation can help prevent further damage.

Common Myths

"Grinding your teeth is harmless."

False.

Long-term bruxism can damage teeth, restorations, and the jaw.

"Only adults grind their teeth."

False.

Bruxism can occur in both children and adults.

Many children outgrow it, but evaluation is still important if symptoms are significant.

"A night guard stops teeth grinding."

Not exactly.

A night guard protects the teeth from damage but does not necessarily stop the grinding itself.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Bruxism is the grinding or clenching of teeth.
 - ✓ Many people grind their teeth during sleep without realizing it.
 - ✓ Untreated bruxism can damage teeth, fillings, crowns, and dental implants.
 - ✓ Custom night guards help protect teeth from excessive wear.
 - ✓ Stress management and healthy sleep habits may help some people.
 - ✓ Regular dental examinations allow early detection before severe damage occurs.
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References

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