

Why the grind?

How to deal with bruxism (tooth grinding). *by Dr. Susan Maples*

Bruuxism is the clinical name for tooth grinding or clenching. Bruxing often happens while you sleep and if you don't wake up with sore chewing muscles, sensitive teeth or pressure in your jaw joint hinges (TMJs) you may not be aware that it's happening. But, if your teeth are wearing down, cracking or breaking...you do it and you need help!

Most people think grinding is a result of stress emotions such as anxiety, anger or frustration. It is true that these can contribute, but there is more to the story. The body likes harmony and we tend to grind when we don't have it.

For example:

Occlusal (bite) Interferences: At night the chewing muscles tend to pull the TMJ's into their comfortable, home base position and the lower jaw hinges closed, hoping for a harmonious closure. If there are bumps in the road you'll grind

them out....and then some.

Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA): When nighttime airway restrictions cause stress to the body many people grind their teeth.

Drug Reactions: Many medications present bruxism as a side effect. The most common are antidepressants but may include everyday drugs such as caffeine, tobacco and alcohol.

Acid Reflux: Stomach acid that shoots up through the throat and airway causes irritation that can stimulate bruxism—especially at night.

Neurologic Origin: A small percentage grind during delta stage sleep and many of this subgroup tend to show other symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder, nail biting or other nervous tics.

Age: Many, or dare we say most children grind teeth at some point or another, especially during the irritation of losing old and gaining new teeth.

Emotional Stress: This can

exacerbate these risk factors, as can having an aggressive, competitive or high-strung personality type.

Bruxism is one of three major dental diseases that can steal your teeth from you.

If you are a suspect, talk to your dentist about identifying the cause(s); they might uncover subtle risk factors for OSA, acid reflux, prescription side effects or bite interferences.

For treatment they might suggest equilibration or bite balancing to remove interferences, or a precision appliance for night wear to help reduce (not just protect) your stimulus to grind.



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