

BRUXISM

Bruxism is the act of grinding or gnashing your teeth. It is a relatively common problem that occurs while you sleep. Although it may not be detrimental to your health, and you may not even know you are doing it, bruxism can be a serious dental problem. Bruxism is felt to affect almost everybody to some degree, and up to 20% of Americans are felt to have bruxism so severe that it is damaging their teeth.

Unrecognized grinding can wear your teeth down. You may develop toothaches from hairline fractures, yet these fractures may be so small even your dentist cannot figure out the toothache is caused by bruxism. Migraine headaches, facial pain, jaw pain and temporal mandibular joint dysfunction (TMJ) may be caused by bruxism. Teeth grinding can also occur with such strong forces that you can crack teeth right off.

Despite all of these problems, some people may not even realize they are grinding their teeth as it typically occurs while asleep. Like heart disease and ulcers, bruxism is considered to be related to stress. Realize however, that bruxism is a sleep disorder, and it can occur during non-stressful periods and in unstressed individuals.

Treatment for bruxism usually involves both relaxation techniques and special oral devices that are fitted by dentists. Here are some guidelines to follow.

1. Learn to wind down a few hours before sleep. Stress and worry prevent you from becoming relaxed before you fall asleep, typically worsening bruxism. Concentrate on relaxing, pleasant thoughts or of peaceful imagery. Bedtime rituals such as reading an enjoyable book, taking a warm bath or listening to soft music can be helpful.
2. Avoid worrying about daily problems. Attempt to review all of your activities and stresses for that day well before you go to bed. If possible, talk about some of your stresses and problems with another person as a means to work through these problems and relax before you go to bed.
3. Do not plan your next day when attempting to fall asleep. Set aside time during the day to deal with worrisome thoughts.
4. Discuss any symptoms you may have with your dentist. Symptoms such as morning headaches, migraine headaches, facial pain, jaw pain and toothaches can result from bruxism. Several splint devices, or protective teeth devices fitted by your dentist can be very effective in reducing bruxism.
5. Consider relaxation therapy, biofeedback or hypnosis. Therapies aimed at teaching people to relax can be very effective in reducing your stresses and possibly reduce the severity and frequency of your teeth grinding.