

Bruxism

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Grinding teeth, or bruxism, is a sleep disorder affecting roughly 20% of adults and up to 30% of children. Bruxism usually occurs during the night as a result of our minds thinking about particular stressors in our lives. It generally occurs in the early stages of sleep, prior to deep sleep.

Bruxism is damaging to any dental work done and can also severely chip or shorten our natural teeth. Bruxism can also cause bite problems, cause jaw dysfunction (TMD), and cause headaches or unexplained facial pain. In addition to stress, other factors that can increase the occurrence of bruxism are: 1) consuming caffeine or nicotine prior to sleep, 2) certain antidepressant medications like Prozac, Zoloft, and Paxil, and 3) specific sleeping positions. A sleep study would be necessary to monitor bruxism associated with a specific sleep position.

Children who grind their teeth often will grow out of the habit with no permanent damage by age 13. However, it is important for a dentist to evaluate whether a temporary protective appliance is appropriate for children with a severe grinding habit. Because children's teeth and bones are constantly growing and changing, I usually recommend a more temporary "boil and bite" type of protective appliance like a sports mouthguard. These can be purchased at sporting goods stores.

I've discovered there's not a "one size fits all" nightguard for everybody. A custom nightguard is better than a store-bought one. But for anyone who grinds their teeth, wearing a store-bought nightguard is better than not wearing any protection. Most people grind their teeth to some degree. I wear a clear retainer at night after having completed Invisalign.

Bruxism, like most sleep disorders, has no true cure. Some people are more intense grinders than others, and preventing damage to your teeth is very important. For adults, I typically recommend a custom fitted night guard made by taking a mold of your teeth. In addition to a custom fit, these appliances are nice because of their durability and effectiveness. A more generic and less expensive option that some people try is an over-the-counter night guard. The Doctor's night guard can be found at most drug stores like CVS. Relaxation techniques like deep breathing, yoga, and listening to gentle music should be used prior to sleeping.