

Could Teeth Grinding be causing your Jaw Pain?

In our high-stress society, bruxism, or teeth grinding, is fairly common, with estimates as high as 1 in 3 adult sufferers. Most people who grind their teeth may not even be aware they are doing it until they begin experiencing jaw pain. Your dentist may find flattened tips and excessive teeth or enamel wear from the grinding, which can lead to more serious issues. A visit to the dentist or orthodontist is recommended to prevent permanent damage to the teeth and underlying bone structure.



Habitual grinding of teeth can lead to serious complications if left untreated. If you believe stress or anxiety is to blame, meditation, exercise, biofeedback, or other stress relieving activities can help reduce the grinding. Your dentist might even recommend counseling services to diagnose and treat mental health issues that could be causing the teeth gnashing. Some teeth grinders have found physical therapy helps to relieve grinding and accompanying jaw pain.

If you believe you may be unconsciously gnashing your teeth during sleep, a mouth guard may be necessary. While you may still grind your teeth with a mouth guard in place, the guard absorbs the pressure so you won't damage your teeth in the process. Many people who use a nightly mouth guard find that they are less likely to grind, as the mouth guard acts as a deterrent. For habitual nightly teeth grinders, your dentist may also prescribe a muscle relaxant. In severe cases, an injection of Botox into the jaw muscle will help relax the muscles, reducing sleep bruxism.

While bruxism is more frequent in adults, children may also experience episodes of teeth grinding. Adults' grinding is most often due to stress,

however children may have other possible causes including allergies or misaligned teeth. If allergies are suspected, a visit to a family physician or allergist for a correct diagnosis and treatment should alleviate the problem. Your dentist can perform x-rays to diagnose teeth misalignment and determine the best treatment. In most cases, children grow out of teeth grinding by their adolescent years.

When jaw pain persists and you suspect you may be grinding your teeth, talk to your dentist about treatment options. If left untreated, not only can you damage your teeth, but you may also be putting yourself at risk for more serious TMJ (temporomandibular joint) problems. Once the causes of the bruxism have been diagnosed and treated, the jaw pain should begin to fade, and with vigilance, be kept at bay.