

Tooth Grinding and Bite Guards

To book an appointment at Avondale house Dental Surgery as either an existing or new patient please give our reception team a call on **01889 582 080** or visit our website to book your appointment online.

Bruxism is the medical term for grinding the teeth and clenching the jaw.

People sometimes grind their teeth without it causing any symptoms or problems. But regular, persistent teeth grinding can cause jaw pain and discomfort and wear down your teeth. It can also cause headaches and earache.

Symptoms of bruxism

Teeth grinding (bruxism) can cause different symptoms, including facial pain, headaches and worn-down teeth.

Some of the symptoms of bruxism, such as facial pain, will often disappear when you stop grinding your teeth. Others, such as tooth damage, can be permanent and may need dental treatment. If you are suffering with these symptoms then please give us a call on 01889 582 080 or use our online booking system to book an appointment with one of our dentists.

Possible symptoms of teeth grinding include:

- headaches
- facial muscle pain (facial myalgia)
- earache
- tightness and stiffness in the shoulders
- pain and stiffness in the jaw joint and surrounding muscles (known as the temporomandibular joint)
- sleep disruption (both to you and your partner)

Symptoms that affect the mouth include:

- worn teeth, which can result in short teeth, increased tooth sensitivity and possible loss of teeth
- fractured teeth or fillings
- difficulty opening your mouth

It's important to note tooth wear only occurs in severe cases of bruxism and not everyone who grinds their teeth will have it.

If your teeth become worn through grinding, you may need dental treatment to avoid developing further problems, such as infection or a dental abscess.

When to see a doctor or dentist

You should see your dentist if:

- your teeth are worn, damaged or sensitive
- you have pain in your jaw, face or ear
- your partner complains that you make a grinding sound in your sleep

Tell your dentist if you think you're grinding your teeth. They'll check your teeth and jaw for signs of bruxism, help work out the possible causes, and suggest appropriate treatment.

See your GP if you grind your teeth and you have high stress levels or anxiety. They'll be able to recommend treatment to help manage your stress, which may alleviate your teeth grinding symptoms.

Most cases of teeth grinding (nearly 80%) occur subconsciously during sleep. It's usually associated with contributing factors, such as stress or anxiety.

Bruxism also affects people when they're awake, although this is more likely to be clenching the teeth and jaw, rather than grinding their teeth. Most people do it subconsciously while concentrating or when they're in stressful situations.

Many people with bruxism find it will come and go. It's likely to be worse during stressful periods.

What causes bruxism?

Bruxism almost always occurs in association with other factors. About 70% of bruxism cases that occur during sleep are thought to be related to stress and anxiety.

There's also an association between bruxism and obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA). OSA is a sleep disorder where your breathing is interrupted during sleep. How bruxism and OSA affect each other isn't currently fully understood.

Teeth grinding can also be caused by taking antipsychotic and antidepressant medication, particularly a type of antidepressant known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).

Your lifestyle can also have an effect. For example, regularly drinking alcohol, smoking and using recreational drugs such as ecstasy and cocaine increases your risk of bruxism.

Doctors sometimes refer to teeth grinding caused by an underlying condition as primary bruxism. Teeth grinding associated with a medication, condition or lifestyle factors is often known as secondary bruxism.

Treating bruxism

There are a number of possible treatments for teeth grinding, but only a few have been shown to be effective.

Behavioural therapies and the use of mouth guards or mouth splints can be effective in managing the symptoms associated with bruxism.

Mouth guards and mouth splints work in the same way by reducing the sensation of clenching or grinding teeth, and also help prevent any wear on the teeth.

Other treatments, such as muscle-relaxation exercises and sleep hygiene, may also help manage your symptoms.

If you grind your teeth while you're asleep, you may need to wear a mouth guard or mouth splint to protect your teeth from further damage.

If you have an anxiety or stress-related problem, a course of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) may be recommended. The aim of CBT is to help you manage your problems by changing the way you think and how you act.

It may be possible to break the habit of teeth grinding using habit-reversal techniques.

Making some simple lifestyle changes, such as giving up smoking (if you smoke), reducing your alcohol consumption and managing stress may also help.

Who's affected by bruxism?

Teeth grinding affects more than six million people in the UK. But the severity of the symptoms and the frequency of grinding varies. It can occur in both children and adults, although it is most common in adults between the ages of 25 and 44

Treating teeth grinding

Recommended treatments for bruxism (teeth grinding) may include exercises and using mouth guards or mouth splints.

Other treatments, such as muscle relaxation exercises and sleep hygiene measures, may also help you manage your symptoms.

Mouth guards and mouth splints

If you grind your teeth while you're asleep, you may need to wear a mouth guard or mouth splint at night.

These even out the pressure across your jaw and create a physical barrier between your upper and lower teeth to protect them from further damage. They can also reduce any grinding noises you make at night.

Mouth guards are similar in appearance to those used in sports such as boxing. They're usually made out of bendy rubber or plastic and can be made by your dentist to fit your mouth. You'll usually have to pay for this type of custom-made dental appliance.

Mouth guards are also available to buy from your local pharmacist. However, it's unlikely to fit as well as one made by your dentist.

A mouth splint (also known as an occlusal splint or bite plate) is made from harder plastic and fits precisely over your upper or lower teeth.

Mouth splints are no more effective than mouth guards in reducing the symptoms of bruxism. They tend to last for years, whereas mouth guards usually last for less than a year. However, mouth splints are more expensive.

Although mouth guards and splints may help reduce muscle activity in your jaw at night, they're only able to control the condition, not cure it.

Treating the underlying cause

Psychological treatments, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), can be used to treat any underlying psychological problems, such as stress and anxiety, that may be causing you to grind your teeth.

CBT aims to help you manage your problems by changing the way you think and how you act. A specially trained therapist will encourage you to talk about how you think about yourself, the world and other people, and how your actions affect your thoughts and feelings.

If your bruxism is stress related, it's important that you try to relax and get a good night's sleep. There are a number of things you can do to help you wind down before you go to bed. These include:

- yoga
- deep breathing
- massage
- reading
- having a bath
- listening to music

Different things will work for different people. Your GP will also be able to recommend some additional stress management techniques.

Breaking the habit

Habit-reversal techniques are designed to break your teeth grinding habit. However, there's no scientific evidence to suggest that using habit-reversal techniques will cure bruxism.

If you grind your teeth while you're awake, it might be useful to record how often you grind your teeth each day. You can then work out when you're more likely to do it and why – for example, when you're concentrating or stressed.

Being more aware of your habit will make it easier to break. To break the habit, you could train yourself to relax your jaw when you feel yourself grinding or clenching. For example, you could open your jaw slightly or gently place your tongue between your upper and lower teeth.

Habit-reversal techniques may be used by a specially trained therapist, or you can try them yourself using a computer programme or self-help book. Your GP will be able to advise you.

Treating and preventing dental problems

It's important that you have regular dental check-ups and that any problems caused by your teeth grinding are treated as soon as possible to prevent further damage.

For example, if your grinding leads to a cracked tooth and is left untreated, the nerve in your tooth could die and a dental abscess might develop. As a result, you may need to have root canal treatment.

In severe cases, your tooth could actually split in two. If this happens, your dentist won't be able to save the tooth and it will need to be taken out.

Dental problems, such as misaligned, cracked, crooked or missing teeth, can usually be treated with reconstructive dental treatments, such as false teeth, overlays and crowns.

These treatments can sometimes reshape the chewing surface of your teeth and stop you grinding. You'll usually have to pay for this type of dental treatment and it can often be expensive.

Preventing bruxism

To help prevent bruxism, you should:

- have regular dental check-ups
- be aware of how stress and anxiety affect you and find relaxation techniques that work for you
- cut back on your alcohol consumption as it can make sleep bruxism worse
- give up smoking (if you smoke)
- avoid using recreational drugs, such as ecstasy and cocaine
- avoid chewing pens, pencils and other non-food items
- be aware of when you grind your teeth (if you do it while awake) and try to break the habit by relaxing your jaw muscles

If you think you may be suffering from tooth grinding and would benefit from a bite guard or have cracked a tooth then please give us a call at Avondale House Dental Surgery on 01889 582 080 or use our online booking service, this can be found on our website.