

Teeth Grinding (Bruxing) and Jaw joint Pain (TMJ)



Bruxism (BRUK-siz-um) is a condition in which you grind or clench your teeth. If you have bruxism, you may unconsciously clench your teeth when you're awake (awake bruxism) or clench or grind them during sleep (sleep bruxism).

Sleep bruxism is considered a sleep-related movement disorder. People who clench or grind their teeth (brux) during sleep are more likely to have other sleep disorders, such as snoring and pauses in breathing (sleep apnoea).

Mild bruxism may not require treatment. However, in some people, bruxism can be frequent and severe enough to lead to jaw disorders, headaches, damaged teeth and other problems.

How do I know if I brux or have a jaw joint disorder?

Signs and symptoms of bruxism may include:

- Teeth grinding or clenching, which may be loud enough to wake up your sleep partner
- Teeth that are flattened, fractured, chipped or loose
- Worn tooth enamel
- Increased tooth pain or sensitivity
- Tired or tight jaw muscles, or a clicking or locking jaw
- Jaw, neck, ear or face pain or soreness
- Pain that feels like an earache, though it's actually not a problem with your ear
- Dull headache starting in the temples
- Damage from chewing on the inside of your cheek
- Vertigo and subjective changes to hearing

What are the risk factors?

- Stress. Increased anxiety or stress can lead to teeth grinding. So can anger and frustration.
- Age. Bruxism is common in young children, but it usually goes away by adulthood.
- Female gender. The most commonly affected group are young females, who suffer this disorder 3-9x more often than age matched males.

- Personality type. Having a personality type that's aggressive, competitive or hyperactive can increase your risk of bruxism.
- Medications and other substances. Bruxism may be an uncommon side effect of some psychiatric medications, such as certain antidepressants. Smoking tobacco, drinking caffeinated beverages or alcohol, or using recreational drugs may increase the risk of bruxism.
- Family members with bruxism. Sleep bruxism tends to occur in families. If you have bruxism, other members of your family also may have bruxism or a history of it.
- Other disorders. Bruxism can be associated with some mental health and medical disorders, such as Parkinson's disease, dementia, gastro-oesophageal reflux disorder (GORD), epilepsy, night terrors, sleep-related disorders such as sleep apnoea, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

What is the Treatment?

In many cases, treatment isn't necessary. Many kids outgrow bruxism without treatment, and many adults don't grind or clench their teeth badly enough to require therapy. However, if the problem is severe, options include certain dental approaches, physical therapies and medications to prevent more tooth damage and relieve jaw pain or discomfort.

Talk with your dentist or doctor to find out which option may work best for you.

Physical Therapy

A physiotherapist with training in orofacial pain and jaw disorders can help to release tense or overworked muscles and provide an exercise/massage regime to help alleviate the pain associated with TMJ and grinding or clenching.

Dental Therapy

If you or your child has bruxism, your doctor may suggest ways to preserve or improve your teeth. Although these methods may prevent or correct the wear to your teeth, they may not stop the bruxism:

Splints and mouth guards. These are designed to keep teeth separated to avoid the damage caused by clenching and grinding. They can be constructed of hard acrylic or soft materials and fit over your upper or lower teeth.

Other treatment strategies to consider;

Stress or anxiety management.

If you grind your teeth because of stress, you may be able to prevent the problem by learning strategies that promote relaxation, such as meditation. If the bruxism is related to anxiety, advice from a licensed therapist or counsellor may help.

Behaviour change.

Once you discover that you have bruxism, you may be able to change the behaviour by practicing proper mouth and jaw position.

Biofeedback.

If you're having a hard time changing your habits, you may benefit from biofeedback, a method that uses monitoring procedures and equipment to teach you to control muscle activity in your jaw. A simple measure that may help includes the use of an App such as the BruxApp, which sends reminders to unclench the jaw and can be helpful for patients with daytime bruxism.

Medications

Muscle relaxants.

In some cases, your doctor may suggest taking a muscle relaxant before bedtime, for a short period of time.

Botox injections.

Injections of Botox, a form of botulinum toxin, may help some people with severe bruxism who don't respond to other treatments.

Medication for anxiety or stress.

Your GP may recommend short-term use of antidepressants or anti-anxiety medications to help you deal with stress or other emotional issues that may be causing your bruxism.

Are there any strategies I can try at home?

Reduce stress.

Listening to music, taking a warm bath or exercising can help you relax and may reduce your risk of developing bruxism.

Avoid stimulating substances in the evening. Don't drink caffeinated coffee or caffeinated tea after dinner and avoid alcohol during the evening, as they may worsen bruxism.

Practice good sleep habits. Getting a good night's sleep, which may include treatment for sleep problems, may help reduce bruxism.

Talk to your sleep partner. If you have a sleeping partner, ask him or her to be aware of any grinding or clicking sounds that you might make while sleeping so you can report this to your dentist or doctor.

The above is general advice only. If you are concerned that you have this condition, please see your doctor for more information.

Reference; The Mayo Clinic Patient Care and Health Information Website.