

# UNDERSTANDING THE SYMPTOMS OF BRUXISM

**I**s work or school stressing you out? You may be taking it out on your teeth through a condition called bruxism. Bruxism is characterized by the grinding of the teeth and is typically accompanied by the clenching of the jaw. Researchers classify bruxism as a habitual behavior, as well as a sleep disorder.



and causes tooth sensitivity, notching of the teeth at the gumlines and fractures. Bruxism also can lead to facial muscle pain and TMD. In severe chronic cases, it can lead to arthritis of the temporomandibular joints.

Most people with bruxism are not aware of the condition, and approximately 5 percent develop symptoms (such as jaw pain and headaches) that require treatment. In many cases, a partner or parent will notice the bruxism before the person experiencing the problem is even aware of it.

## How is bruxism diagnosed?

The patient often becomes aware of the condition during a routine dental examination. Your dentist will be able to recognize the signs of bruxism and may even suggest further analysis, such as recommending an overnight stay at a sleep laboratory.

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## How many people are affected by bruxism?

According to the National Sleep Foundation, 8 percent of adults grind their teeth at night. Untreated bruxism can lead to other health problems, damage to the teeth and gums and even temporomandibular joint disorder (TMD).

## What causes bruxism?

Bruxism can have numerous causes, such as bite problems, stress, medical conditions or certain medications. One study links bruxism with factors including alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, caffeine, sleep apnea, snoring and fatigue as well, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

## What are signs and symptoms of bruxism?

The symptoms of bruxism vary and can include: anxiety, stress and tension; depression; earache; eating disorders; headache; insomnia; and a sore or painful jaw. If left untreated, bruxism eventually shortens and blunts teeth

## How is bruxism treated?

Treatments can include mouthguards, bite adjustments, bio-feedback devices and repair of damaged teeth.

## What can I do to minimize teeth grinding at night?

There are steps you can take to prevent bruxism at night:

- Maintain a relaxing nighttime routine, and ensure that you have a comfortable, distraction-free space in which to sleep.
- Sleep on your side or stomach, not on your back.
- Get plenty of sleep at night and exercise during the day.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, it's recommended that young adults and adults sleep for seven to nine hours.

If you're experiencing bruxism symptoms, or if you're told that you seem to be grinding your teeth during the night, talk with your dentist.