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Do you grind your teeth?

Bruxism, or grinding of the teeth can occur at any age. Many people are unaware that they are grinding their teeth because it often happens while they sleep. They sometimes wake with a headache, toothache, earache, or a sore face. Grinding can wear away or fracture tooth enamel and may eventually loosen teeth.

The causes of bruxism are not well understood, but several factors may be involved. Stress, problems sleeping, an abnormal bite, and cracked or missing teeth may be responsible.

Regular dental checkups are important to detect damage at the early stages. Your dentist can diagnose and treat irregular wear on teeth and determine the source of facial pain that may result from bruxism.

Based on the diagnosis, one or more treatments may be recommended. The dentist may suggest a custom-made appliance that can be worn while sleeping. The appliance slips over the upper or lower teeth and prevents contact with the opposing teeth. The appliance will not only protect the teeth, but will relieve the pressure of clenching and grinding.

All the stresses of everyday life are a major cause of bruxism.

It is helpful to find ways to relax- listening to music, taking a walk, reading a book, or a warm bath.

Applying a warm washcloth to the side of the face may help relax the muscles of the face and provide relief from clenching. If you have difficulty handling stress, counseling may point to effective ways for handling stressful situations.

An abnormal bite, one in which teeth do not fit well together, may lead to grinding. Treatment may involve reducing the “high spots” of one or more teeth to even the bite. For serious cases, your dentist may suggest reshaping or reconstructing the biting surfaces with inlays, onlays, or crowns.

Grinding and clenching are common occurrences for many people at some time or another. If you suspect that you are routinely grinding your teeth, see your dentist about protecting your smile.