

## Bruxism (Teeth Grinding and Clenching)

### What is Bruxism (Teeth Grinding and Clenching)

Bruxism, more commonly referred to as teeth grinding, involves clenching of the jaw and the grinding or gnawing of teeth. It can happen consciously but more often is a subconscious reaction generally caused by stress, anger, and anxiety, which can happen during sleep, and /or when awake. It is not until symptoms arise that an individual becomes aware of the issue. If left unmanaged it can lead to more serious temporomandibular joint disorders (TMJD) or (TMD) and tooth damage.



### Signs & Symptoms

- Painful jaw muscles and joints which can increase when consuming food.
- Teeth and gums become achy.
- Headaches, tension headaches, neck pain, sore ears, sensitive scalp, and in some cases severe migraines.
- Facial and jaw muscles can tighten and become sore when waking up and during the day as well.
- Teeth can become cracked or chipped or even loosen, rarer still it can result in the loss of teeth.
- Dental fillings, crowns or bridges can fracture and fall out.
- Extreme jaw clenching and temporomandibular disorders (TMD).
- Trauma to the tissue of the tongue and inside of the cheek.
- Teeth can become sensitive to touch and hot and cold temperature changes when consuming food and drink.

### Risk Factors

The cause of bruxism is often a mixture of both physical and psychological reasons. Physical being; lifestyle choices that impact our oral health, like alcohol, smoking, caffeine, and drugs; both pharmaceutical and recreational. Psychologically speaking, anger, anxiety, stress, and other mental health disorders can result in clenching and grinding our teeth. The impact of TMD on women outnumbers men by 9:1, and is most common in people aged between 20 and 40.

If the bruxism occurs mainly at night, sleep disturbances such as snoring or sleep apnoea could be a cause and you should seek medical advice for this.

If the root of the issue is due to psychological reasons, it is important to get help to deal with your concerns. Seek advice from your dentist or if necessary call Lifeline 131 114 or Beyond Blue 1300 224 636. Getting support can help.

### Children and Teeth Grinding

Children will often grind their teeth due to stress, misaligned teeth, loosening of deciduous [ baby] teeth, eruption of adult teeth, or more rarely medical conditions such as Cerebral Palsy or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and have even been found to grind because they enjoy the feeling.

In most cases, it is a childhood habit that they will grow out of. Children's teeth and jaw structure change dramatically as they age and lose their baby teeth, for this reason, there is less of a concern of permanent damage occurring. However, it is important to be mindful of the cause of grinding, especially if it continues into their teens. Many of the signs and treatments are the same for children as they are for adults and the earlier bad habits are managed the higher chance the issue will not carry on into their adult lives. Your dentist will be best placed to assess each child's situation and need for treatment.



### Management & Treatment

Where possible it is always best practice to eliminate the causes of bruxism. Remove the risk factors where possible and seek advice from health professionals for addressing psychological or physical-medical causes. Applying heat or cold packs can help reduce pain and inflammation. Relaxation and stress relief techniques can also be helpful, yoga, deep breathing or massaging the jaw and neck muscles. Avoiding hard to chew foods will also help to minimise further irritation.

It may be necessary to have restorative work on your teeth such as fillings or crowns and in severe cases even have teeth removed. Speak with your dentist if you have symptoms of bruxism or are concerned about any permanent damage.

Your Dentist may refer you to your general practitioner (GP) or a sleep physician, research has shown links between sleep apnoea and bruxism.

Protecting and preventing further damage to your teeth is of the utmost importance. People with chronic bruxism who suffer from regular symptoms may be prescribed to wear an occlusal splint.

### Occlusal Splints

Often referred to as a bite splint or night mouthguard, an occlusal splint helps alleviate the symptoms of bruxism. They do not stop grinding and clenching completely but they will help protect the teeth from further damage as well as help relieve stress to the facial muscles and jaw joints. Over time they can help reduce the amount of involuntary grinding as well as aid in more rested sleeping.

If you have been prescribed an occlusal splint be sure to clean it after wearing it and keep it stored in a dry protected case. The plastic can become brittle if not maintained as well as act like a petri dish for the bacteria of the mouth. Your dentist will ask you to bring it to your regular check-ups to ensure it still fits or doesn't become misshapen or damaged.

### Addressing the root of the issue

Like most health concerns there are often a multitude of causes and potential solutions. Treating and preventing problems such as bruxism is always best done early to help prevent long-lasting damage. Poor habits are much easier to kick when we are young or the issue has been caught early in its progression. Your dentist will be best placed to address your concerns and where necessary will refer you to other health professionals for aiding with psychological risk factors.



### Dr. Bob's Clenching and Bruxism Advice

You may clench or grind your teeth during the day. Become mindful and observe yourself for telltale signs of this. You could have pain that travels from the upper or lower teeth, or travel from the left side or right side of the jaw and it can be non-specific - that is difficult to tell where it's coming from. You could have tension headaches at the same time and pain radiating to your ear, behind the eyes in the temples or cheeks. You could feel a pain specifically in one tooth.

Some people jam or press or hold their tongues against their teeth. Some people constantly hold the lower teeth against the top teeth thinking this is normal and comfortable - this is an act of subtle clenching and constant tension. In actual fact the lower teeth should sit away from the upper teeth and slightly loose. The tongue should rest gently on the top of the lower teeth or slightly back with comfort - the gap between the upper and lower teeth is called the freeway space and should be about 1-5mm.

Therefore the first task is being mindful. Whenever you notice any habit of clenching or tongue chewing, lip or cheek biting simply acknowledge that you are doing this and simply let go. This will take practice and be patient with yourself.

Once you have become proficient at this you can then ask yourself these five questions -

- Where am I?
- What am I doing?
- Who am I with?
- What am I thinking?
- How am I feeling?

These can potentially be the precursors to clenching and grinding of teeth and you can manage these circumstances yourself or with the help of your GP or other health professionals.

You can always contact Dr Bob Cvetkovic at his rooms (03) 9822 3366 for further advice or in the case of emergencies.