



Bruxism: What is Teeth Grinding?

Around 8-10% of the population are affected by Bruxism, more commonly referred to as teeth grinding. However it's not just grinding teeth that is one of the symptoms of bruxism, it is also commonly associated with jaw clenching.

Bruxism is split into two different types. Sleep bruxism is characterised by sufferers grinding their teeth at night and/or contracting their jaw. Awake bruxism is characterised by a lack of grinding teeth but involuntary clenching and bracing of the jaw is still present.

Whichever is present, the results of ongoing teeth grinding and bruxism can include:

- Jaw pain, discomfort & reduced movement
- Worn & damaged teeth
- Broken teeth
- Headaches
- Earaches

Although anybody can be affected by the condition, it's significantly more common between the mid-20s and mid-40s.

Why do people grind their teeth?

There are a number of reasons that are believed to be why people grind their teeth but one of the main causes is believed to be stress and anxiety. This may be the reason why it's young adults and middle aged people that are affected worst.

Obstructive sleep apnoea may be another cause of bruxism. Sleep bruxism often occurs during episodes of deep sleep and specifically, to arousals or stimuli, therefore it may be an indication of a sleep disorder. Again, one of the main symptoms is teeth grinding while sleeping.

Finally, medication, recreational drug use or an underlying medical condition can be causes of bruxism. Certain antidepressants, as well as drugs such as cocaine and ecstasy can induce teeth grinding both while awake and asleep. Parkinson's disease, depression and anxiety disorders may also be a contributing factor.

How to stop grinding teeth

There are no specific cures as to how to stop teeth grinding as it is often a sign of another condition, however, there are ways of reducing or at least managing bruxism.

Mouth guards or splints can be an effective way to manage teeth grinding and bruxism. While these don't address the causes, they do manage the effects and reduce damage to the teeth. If it's believed that stress, anxiety or depression may be the cause of grinding teeth then traditional methods such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can be effective.

Finally, as with a lot of conditions, simply being as healthy as possible can reduce or minimise bruxism. For example, giving up smoking and/or reducing alcohol consumption can help.