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Teeth Grinding

Over the past few years I have awoken several times during the night from the same terrifying nightmare – my teeth are crumbling into pieces and falling out in my hand. Luckily those were only bad dreams, but I did discover (after several years of being a dentist) that I grind my teeth at night. Bruxism, or teeth grinding, is fairly common among today’s anxious, overstressed society, and the damage caused by bruxism can be costly.

Why do people grind their teeth?

There may be one or multiple factors contributing to someone’s bruxism, but improper occlusion (the way the teeth “bite”) and stress are the two most common. Often people aren’t aware of nighttime grinding which is the most common time for it to occur.

Teeth grinding can cause not only damage to the teeth but also to the facial muscles, jaw joints, and bone. Teeth may develop cracks that require crowns or possibly even extraction of the tooth entirely. Teeth may become worn and unattractive, and the gums may recede exposing some of the tooth roots. Sensitivity to hot or cold and loosening of the teeth may occur. Sometimes grinding causes muscle soreness or spasms resulting in facial tiredness, pain when chewing, or headaches. Bruxism can also damage the temporomandibular joints which may be evidenced by a clicking or popping noise when you open or close your mouth, pain around the ear, or a jaw that gets “stuck” or “locks.”

Teeth grinding can be treated by different methods but most commonly by wearing while you sleep a hard occlusal guard custom-made for you by your dentist. Sometimes corrections of your “bite” through placement of new restorations and/or selective recontouring of your teeth can be helpful. Occasionally muscle relaxers are prescribed along with relaxation therapy. If you notice soreness of your teeth or facial muscles when you wake up, teeth that look flattened or chipped, or any of the other before mentioned signs and symptoms, see your dentist. It may save your smile!

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