

Bruxism

(Teeth Grinding and Clenching)



What is bruxism?

Bruxism is the technical term for teeth grinding and clenching that often leads to pain with your teeth, facial muscles and jaw joints. People unintentionally bite down too hard at inappropriate times, such as in their sleep or during times of stress. In addition, these bruxers may also bite their fingernails, pencils and chew the inside of their cheeks. People usually are not diagnosed with bruxism until it is too late because most of them do not realize they have the habit. Others mistakenly believe that their teeth must touch at all times.

Who suffers from bruxism?

One in three people suffer from bruxism. Bruxism is triggered by people with certain types of personalities. They may have a nervous tension and a hard time handling stress. Anger, pain, stress and frustration can cause people to start showing the beginning signs of bruxism without them even knowing it. People who are aggressive, competitive and hurried also may be at a greater risk for bruxism.

What are the signs of bruxism?

- The edges or chewing surfaces of the teeth appear flat or worn
- Teeth may be sensitive due to the inner layer of the tooth (i.e., the dentin) becoming exposed from a loss of the outer protective layer of enamel
- Pain in the jaw joints (i.e., the TMJs) or facial muscles due to excessive muscle contraction and force
- General tooth soreness from excessive forces being placed on the ligament that holds the tooth in its socket
- Tongue indentations
- Headaches

How is bruxism treated?

Drs. Camp and Heubner will automatically check for physical signs of bruxism at your initial visit and each 6-month recall appointment. If beginning signs of bruxism are present, the condition may be observed over several visits before recommending and starting therapy. The objective of therapy is to get the bruxer to change his/her behavior by learning how to rest the tongue, teeth and lips properly as well as to reduce stress levels in their lives. While simply becoming aware of the problem and changing their behavior may be enough for some people, others will have to wear a plastic mouth appliance, called an occlusal night guard, to absorb the force of biting and prevent further damage to the teeth. When advanced tooth wear is observed, or when there is a recent history of fractures to the teeth or existing restorations (e.g., crowns or fillings), some teeth may have to be crowned. Please talk to us the next time you are in if you notice any of the signs of bruxism.