

Nightguards (Occlusal Splints): Rest Easy and Protect Your Smile While You Sleep!

**Q****What is bruxism?****A**

Bruxism is the dental term for grinding or clenching your teeth. Grinding can happen side to side or front to back, it happens most often during sleep.¹ You may experience soreness or pain in your jaw and facial muscles, dull headaches and/or ear-ache like symptoms.¹

Bruxism can cause dental enamel to be worn away, exposing deep layers within teeth. This can also increase tooth pain and sensitivity. Continued clenching and grinding can result in teeth that are flattened, fractured, chipped or loose.²

Bruxism may take place while a person is sleeping or awake. When occurring at night it is considered a sleep-related movement disorder.²

Q**What causes bruxism and why is it important to my oral health?****A**

There are several things that can cause bruxism; stress, anxiety, sleep disorders, abnormal bite or even crooked or missing teeth. People who smoke or drink alcohol are twice as likely to grind their teeth.¹ Other things that could contribute to bruxism are age, personality type, medications (such as antidepressants) family history and some health issues like Parkinson's disease, gastroesophageal reflux (GERD), dementia, epilepsy, sleep apnea and ADHD to name a few.²

Bruxism is common in young children, but they will generally grow out of it.²

Most cases of bruxism do not cause serious issues, however severe grinding or clenching can lead to damaged teeth or issues with your jaw, known as temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorder.²

Q**How do you treat bruxism and what is a nightguard or occlusal splint?****A**

Many cases of bruxism do not require treatment.² However, there are several approaches when the severity of bruxing requires treatment. A nightguard (occlusal splint) or mouthguard can help prevent wearing down enamel or damaging of the teeth. These guards are designed to keep teeth top and bottom teeth apart.² They can be made of soft materials or hard acrylic and fit over your teeth.²

Q**What questions should I ask my dentist if they recommend a nightguard?²****A**

- What is causing my grinding or clenching?
- Is it causing abnormal wear of my teeth that will lead to other problems?
- Are there other treatment options available?
- What types of materials are available for the guard you are recommending?
- Can I see and touch an example before you have one made for me?
- How often should I wear it?
- How do I take care of it?

1.American Dental Association, Mouth Healthy, Teeth Grinding, <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/t/teeth-grinding>, accessed 06.24.2024.

2. Mayo Clinic, Bruxism, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bruxism/symptoms-causes/syc-20356095>, accessed 06.24.2024.

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