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## Teeth grinding

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### Summary

- Teeth grinding (bruxism) is involuntary clenching, grinding and gnashing of the teeth that usually happens during sleep.
  - Causes can include stress, concentration and use of illegal drugs.
  - Treatments include bite splints (to be worn at night), repair of tooth damage, muscle relaxant medication and stress management therapy.
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Bruxism is the involuntary clenching, grinding and gnashing of the teeth. About half of the population does it from time to time. Around five per cent of the population are regular, forceful tooth grinders. Often it happens during sleep, but some people grind their teeth when they are awake.

Usually, a person doesn't realise that they grind their teeth in their sleep. The partner who shares their bed (and hears the grinding noises at night) is often the first to notice the problem. Parents may also hear it in their sleeping children. Teeth grinding can be a result of stress. For example, some people grind their teeth when they are angry, concentrating or feeling anxious.

### Symptoms of teeth grinding

Signs and symptoms of teeth grinding include:

- grinding sounds while the person is asleep
- headache, jaw joint and/or ear pain
- aching teeth, particularly just after waking up
- aching and/or stiffness of the face and temples just after waking up
- aching or stiffness in the jaws while chewing, particularly during breakfast
- clenching the jaw when angry, anxious or concentrating
- temperature-sensitive teeth
- cracked or chipped tooth enamel
- tooth indentations on the tongue
- raised tissue on the inside of the cheek caused by biting
- loose teeth.

### Effects of teeth grinding

Problems caused by teeth grinding may include:

- cracked tooth enamel
- more wear and tear on the teeth than is normal
- broken teeth or broken restorations (for example, fillings)
- strain on the jaw joint (temporomandibular joint)
- pain in the jaw joint or limited movement
- sore jaw muscles
- tooth loss (rare)
- enlargement of the jaw muscles (rare).
- teeth being more sensitive to hot and cold things

## Causes of teeth grinding

The cause of bruxism can involve biological (e.g. genetics), psychological (e.g. personality traits) and/or external factors such as smoking, caffeine, alcohol and some drugs. Your dentist or other oral health professional can assess the influence of these factors.

Teeth grinding is also common in children. However, because their teeth and jaws change and grow so quickly it is not usually a damaging habit that requires treatment and most outgrow it by their teenage years.

## Treatment for teeth grinding

If you think you grind your teeth, speak with your dentist or other oral health professional. They will look at your teeth and talk about possible treatment options that may include:

- repair of tooth damage
- a special mouthguard ('bite splint') to wear at night so that the guard is worn down instead of your teeth. In most cases, a bite splint will only help with the symptoms and will not stop you from grinding altogether.

Management of bruxism can include:

- stress management therapy
- relaxation techniques
- cognitive behaviour therapy
- regular exercise
- medication that relaxes the muscles.

## Where to get help

- Your dentist
- **Dental Health Services Victoria** provides public dental services through the **Royal Dental Hospital Melbourne** and community dental clinics, for eligible people. For more information about public dental services Tel. (03) 9341 1000, or 1800 833 039 outside Melbourne metro
- **Australian Dental Association 'Find a Dentist'** search function or Tel. (03) 8825 4600
- Your GP
- Psychologist, to help with stress management
- Physiotherapist

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

Dental Health Services Victoria

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