

Understanding Teeth Grinding (Bruxism)

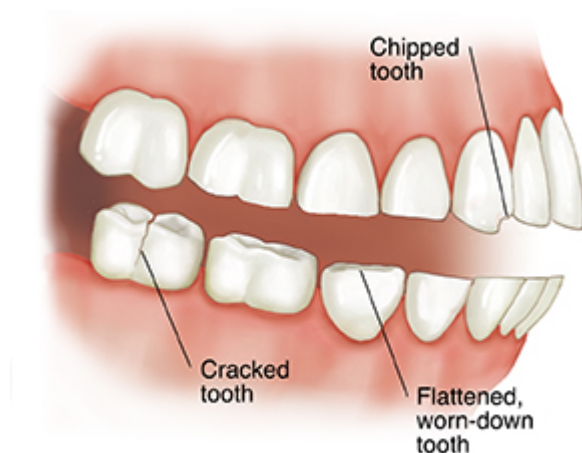
Teeth grinding (bruxism) may happen at any time. People often grind their teeth while sleeping and may not even be aware of it. Stress is one possible cause. But the cause isn't always known.

Damage caused by teeth grinding

Teeth grinding may cause:

- Chipped enamel and cracked teeth
- Flattened, grooved, worn-down teeth
- Loosened teeth
- More rapid progression of gum (periodontal) problems

If it goes untreated, bruxism may lead to jaw muscle and joint problems. These are known as TMJ (temporomandibular joint) problems or TMD (temporomandibular disorder). You could even lose your teeth.



Evaluating the problem

Your dentist will examine your entire mouth and ask several questions. Your dentist will check for worn teeth and enamel. This evaluation helps confirm that you do grind your teeth. It may also help find a possible cause of your teeth-grinding habit.

The symptoms of grinding

Symptoms like these may be a signal that you grind your teeth:

- A sore, tired jaw
- Sensitive teeth
- Loose teeth

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- Dull headaches, earaches, or neck aches
 - Clicking sounds when you open your mouth

Treatments

Your dentist may suggest one or more of these treatments:

- **A mouth guard.** This is a plastic device that fits over your teeth. It protects teeth from grinding damage. It's worn at the times when you're most likely to grind your teeth.
- **Bite adjustment.** This involves fixing the way your top teeth fit against your bottom teeth. It can reduce the chances of grinding if your bite is uneven.
- **Reducing stress.** This may reduce grinding by relaxing your jaw muscles. Your dentist may advise ways to reduce stress, such as exercise, counseling, or meditation.
- **Medicine.** The dentist may prescribe a muscle relaxant to take before bedtime. This can help ease sore muscles.