

Grinding to a Halt

BRUXISM, OR TOOTH GRINDING, IS A SURPRISINGLY COMMON HABIT. DR JEAN PAUL DEMAJO DISCUSSES WAYS OF DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM


Bruxism is a real habit that is more common than you might think. One could even be a mild bruxist and not know it. In fact most people have some degree of grinding. This may simply present itself as a worn facet on your tooth or as a largely worn down tooth. These teeth typically develop a characteristic look, usually appearing as flat, even teeth. Bruxism may occur during sleep, subconsciously when awake or a combination of both.

A normal smile is one where each tooth carries its own characteristics and individual lengths. The smile of a bruxist is one where all the upper and/or lower teeth usually have similar lengths. Instead of having gently rounded contours, their biting edges are frequently worn straight across. Often on sliding the jaw from side to side, which is what happens on grinding, the edges of the upper teeth match up perfectly with the edges of the lower teeth.

Causes of Bruxism

- Emotional: anxiety, stress, tension
- Personality: aggressive, competitive
- Abnormal alignment of upper and lower teeth (malocclusion)
- Sleep apnea
- Stomach acid reflux
- Some medications, such as phenothiazines or certain antidepressants

Prevention is better than Cure

Doing nothing to resolve the habit will aggravate the situation. Ironically, in some cases, certain treatments may actually worsen matters and not solve them. The take-home message is that the grinding habit must be brought under control and only then must the teeth be restored and safeguarded with the right choice of materials. Ask your dentist! 

Signs of bruxism

- Length: Normally, central incisors and canines are about the same length, with the lateral incisors being just a little bit shorter. People suffering from bruxism lose tooth length, which may even cause them to clench harder. Restoring the length of teeth may not match up exactly to what it originally was but must be close enough to tally with the rest of your facial dimensions.
- Colour: Worn down teeth have the tendency to be darker due to the tooth responding to the load by depositing tertiary dentine (darker in colour).
- Chipping/Fracturing of teeth: Anterior teeth develop micro-cracks that lead to facets breaking away. Posterior teeth often lose a wall or two.
- Sensitivity: Wearing the top enamel layer off exposes dentine and its tubules, leading to sensitivity. Dentine is much softer than enamel and so the wear accelerates.
- Mandibular joint and muscular pain

Controlling bruxism

- Unfortunately a night-guard or similar appliance used during the day is one of the only ways of controlling the habit of bruxism

CASE SCENARIO

- Young man, early 40s
- Unhappy with aesthetics
- Concerned about worn teeth
- Missing lower posterior teeth
- Treatment plan is to stabilize habit, restore worn teeth and replace missing teeth.



Intra oral view before the treatment

Note the short and chipped upper incisors as well as the fractured porcelain on the bridge in the right hand side of the picture



Extra oral view after the treatment

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