



## TIP SHEET Teeth Grinding and Jaw Clenching



Bruxism is a medical term used to describe when a person grinds his/her teeth or clenches his/her jaw. This is often done during sleep, but can also occur during the daytime. About one third of all children grind or clench, with the highest incidence occurring in children under the age of 5. Pediatric bruxism can occur more commonly in children with autism spectrum disorders or other developmental disabilities.

**What causes bruxism?** Although there have been studies, no one is certain why people clench or grind their teeth. There are many theories, including: stress, misalignment of top and bottom teeth, and a response to pain due to teething or earaches. Another theory cites that bruxism is indirectly caused by allergens that make the soft tissues in the nose, mouth and Eustachian tube swell. Grinding of the teeth tightens the soft palate and in turn opens these passages.

**What are the consequences of bruxism and how is it treated?** Most cases of pediatric bruxism do not require treatment as children usually outgrow the behavior between the ages of 9 and 12 years and before damage to permanent teeth can occur. However, dental problems can occur if baby teeth get worn down too far, causing pain or infection. A mouth guard or night guard might be prescribed for your child if wear on teeth becomes severe. Mouth guards should be used with caution as they can present a choking hazard if becoming dislodged during sleep. They may also interfere with a child's jaw growth.

If your child's bruxism is caused by stress, you may be able to help him/her by determining the cause of stress and finding other ways to cope. Relaxing your child before bedtime by giving a deep-pressure massage, listening to relaxing or rhythmic music, taking a warm bath, or drinking warm tea may help reduce grinding and clenching. If your child's dentist determines that his or her teeth are not aligned properly, your dentist may be able to polish the teeth to make them fit together more comfortably. If your child grinds or clenches due to pain, a visit to the pediatrician may be helpful in determining the best course of action to decrease the pain. A visit to the pediatrician may also be advised if you suspect allergens as the cause of your child's bruxism.

If you suspect bruxism, discuss your concerns with your pediatrician or dentist before starting any treatment strategies.

*Disclaimer: This information is provided for reference only. Consult your dentist before engaging in any procedures, practices, or treatments.*

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