

# What is bruxism?



**D**o you clench your jaws when you get stressed or angry? Many people do, but some people clench, thrust their jaw forward, or grind their teeth repeatedly without realizing they are doing it—sometimes even in their sleep. When these behaviors become habits, it is called bruxism.<sup>1</sup>

## WHO IS AT RISK FOR BRUXISM?

You may develop bruxism as an adult or as a child. Sleep bruxism can develop as early as age 4 years, but it peaks at the ages of 10 through 14 years.<sup>2</sup> Awake bruxism is more common in adults.<sup>3</sup>

## WHAT CAUSES BRUXISM?

No one knows what causes bruxism. However, studies have found some problems common among people with the habit. Awake bruxism seems to be strongly related to emotional stress.<sup>1</sup> And many people with sleep bruxism also have breathing difficulties when they sleep, like snoring or interrupted breathing. In fact, more than half the children in 1 study with interrupted breathing also had sleep bruxism.<sup>2</sup>

Some medications also may trigger bruxism. Drinking beverages with caffeine and smoking tobacco also may increase the risk of developing bruxism.<sup>3</sup>

## CAN BRUXISM CAUSE DAMAGE?

Bruxism is hard on your teeth and your muscles. It is estimated that people with bruxism clench or bite down with a force six times greater than normal forces.<sup>4</sup>

Damage to your teeth can range from surface cracks to broken teeth or restorations. This can result in tooth pain. In the worst case, teeth can be lost as a result of bruxism.<sup>1</sup> The stress from bruxism also can damage the tissues that support the teeth, causing teeth to become loose.<sup>1</sup>

Bruxism also can cause other symptoms (**Box**).

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Talk to your dentist if you think you have bruxism. He or she may suggest the following<sup>1</sup>:

- Medications like muscle relaxers or shots that can help reduce muscle tension
- Talking to your physician about medications you take to see if they are contributing to the problem.

Your dentist also may suggest the use of an oral appliance to help protect your teeth. He or she can make a customized plastic tray that fits over either your top or bottom teeth, which may help reduce clenching or grinding.

## Box: What are the signs of bruxism?

How do you know if you have bruxism? Signs to watch for include the following\*

- Jaw pain or stiffness
- Wear on your teeth
- Headaches (especially when you wake up)
- Teeth that are sensitive to hot or cold
- Indentations along the side of the tongue
- Restlessness during sleep
- Daytime sleepiness
- Waking frequently during the night
- Difficulty getting to sleep

\* Sources: Goldstein and Clark<sup>1</sup> and Saulue and colleagues.<sup>2</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Bruxism is the habit of grinding your teeth or clenching or thrusting your jaw forward. It can cause headaches and muscle pain and damage your teeth and gum tissues. Talk to your dentist about ways to help identify and interrupt bruxism. ■

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You can find more information for patients at [ADAcatalog.org](http://ADAcatalog.org) or at [MouthHealthy.org](http://MouthHealthy.org).

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