

TREATING TEETH GRINDING

IN KIDS



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Adults aren't the only ones grinding their teeth at night. Teeth grinding, medically known as bruxism, occurs in children, too. Most of the time, it doesn't cause any pain or damage to teeth. In serious cases, nighttime grinding can wear down tooth enamel (the hard covering on your teeth) and cause jaw problems and pain, but these problems usually happen to adults.

Bruxism occurs in up to 30 percent of children, often around the ages of 5 and 6; however, it can occur at any age. It can also happen when a child begins to get his or her permanent teeth. It could drive the parents or brothers and sisters nuts with the sound! They typically outgrow it, but for some children it can be an ongoing problem. Many kids grind their teeth at some time or another.

Why and When Do Kids Grind?

Almost all children who grind their teeth do it only at night. Grinding the teeth during the daytime too should make parents more concerned.

Some researchers think children brux because their top and bottom teeth don't fit together comfortably. Others believe that children grind their teeth because of tension, anger, allergy problems, or as a response to pain from an earache or teething. Caffeinated drinks like cola may increase the likelihood of bruxism.

Some kids grind their teeth not because of a tooth problem but rather a difficulty in breathing through their nose. If they can't breathe well, they will slide their jaw side to side in an attempt to open the airway, and their teeth can get in the way of that. You may want to have your dentist check for the following:

your child's tonsils touching in the back of their throat, mouth breathing, high palatal

vault, crossbite, any allergies, snoring, or recurrent ear infections. Your dentist may refer you to an ENT (ear, nose and throat specialist) or to a doctor who specializes in treating the effects of a compromised airway. Often having tonsils and adenoids removed will correct this condition.

Since stress often plays a part in bruxism, it is a good idea to help a child talk about how they feel and anything that has caused tension, fear, or anger. Do this in the course of the bedtime routine. For example, when your child is telling you about his day, ask some questions about how those events made him feel. While this may or may not help with your child's tooth grinding, it does let him know that you care about how he feels. It is probably best not to draw attention to the tooth grinding itself. Most children will stop tooth grinding on their own without the need for special treatments.

Will My Child's Teeth Be Harmed?

Usually grinding results in wear to teeth but does not cause actual harm. The baby teeth (also called primary teeth) can show a lot of wear to their surfaces without causing pain or other problems. If the teeth get very worn down, dental problems, such as tooth infections, can occur. See your dentist if your child has pain, and be sure to keep appointments for routine checkups.

Usually, kids don't need to do anything about bruxism. But if it's causing your child pain or other problems, the dentist might give you something called a night guard. A night guard is a piece of plastic, kind of like a mouth guard that a football player wears. A night guard is worn at night and is fitted especially for your child's teeth and mouth to prevent grinding the teeth. Your dentist can make a custom mouth guard. Over-the-counter mouth guards are available and they're less expensive than custom guards, but they generally don't fit well and can dislodge during bruxing. 

Goodbye to the Grinding

- *Cut out caffeinated drinks*
- *Rule out breathing problems due to*
- *Tonsils*
- *Allergies*
- *Pain from earache or teething*
- *Restricted breathing*
- *Talk to your child about his/her day – let him know you care how he feels.*
- *Relax your child with a bath, massage, soothing music or a story at bedtime.*
- *Catch dental problems early – with checkups every 6 months.*
- *Your dentist can make a dental guard to be used to stop the grinding.*

