

Bruxism (teeth-grinding)

What is bruxism?

Bruxism is the medical term for teeth grinding. Surprisingly, teeth grinding is common in children. Children and adolescents can grind their teeth in any stage of sleep but are more likely to do it during the first half of the night, when non-REM sleep is more common.

Teeth grinding in babies

Almost 50% of babies grind their teeth. It usually begins at about age 10 months, after baby has their two top front and two bottom front teeth (deciduous incisors). Some babies only grind their teeth a little bit, whereas others can do it throughout most of the night. In babies, teeth grinding is not of any concern and eventually goes away on its own. While teeth grinding in adults can lead to dental problems, teeth grinding in babies is nothing to be alarmed about. It is highly unlikely that a child is doing any damage to their teeth. However, if the teeth grinding is worrisome or if there are any changes in your child's teeth, do see a dentist.

Teeth grinding in children and adolescents

Bruxism also occurs in older children and adolescents, usually around age 10. Almost 95% of all adults have ground their teeth at least once in their life, and many do it often. It is seen just as often in children.

Obstructive sleep apnea (airway blocking that occurs during sleep) can trigger bruxism. If your child has snoring, mouth breathing or signs of apnea (pauses in breathing), you should alert your primary care provider, as they may need further evaluation. Teeth grinding is also more common in children with disabilities, especially those with cerebral palsy and developmental delay. Along with teeth grinding, your older child may have teeth pain, temporomandibular joint pain, and headaches. Dental erosion can be a concern with frequent bruxism. Finally, stress is likely to result in increased bruxism.

What can you do about bruxism?

Nothing much needs to be done if a child is grinding their teeth. It is usually of little concern. However, relaxation strategies may be helpful. If a child is having headaches, having tooth pain, or is wearing down her teeth, talk to a dentist. Older children and adolescents may benefit from a mouth guard, which prevents dental erosion.

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