

**B**RUXISM is the medical term for grinding, gnashing or clenching your teeth. This condition affects both kids and adults.

Some people with bruxism unconsciously clench their teeth together during the day, often when they feel anxious or tense. Most kids who have bruxism and some adults with the condition grind or gnash their teeth during sleep, usually in the early part of the night. This is called sleep bruxism.

In most cases, bruxism is mild and may not even require treatment. However, it can be frequent and violent and can lead to jaw disorders, headaches, damaged teeth and other problems. Unfortunately, people with sleep bruxism usually aren't aware of the habit, so they aren't diagnosed with the condition until complications occur. That's why it's important to know the signs and symptoms of bruxism and to seek regular dental care.

### Signs and symptoms

*The signs and symptoms of bruxism may include:*

- Teeth grinding or clenching, which may be loud enough to wake your sleep partner.
- Teeth that are worn down, flattened or chipped
- Worn tooth enamel, exposing the inside of your tooth
- Increased tooth sensitivity
- Jaw pain or tightness in your jaw muscles
- Earache because of violent jaw muscle contractions, not a problem with your ear
- Dull morning headache
- Chronic facial pain
- Chewed tissue on the inside of your cheek

Doctors don't completely understand the causes of bruxism. In some adults, abnormal alignment of upper and lower teeth (malocclusion) may contribute to the problem.

*More often, psychological factors cause bruxism, including:*

- Anxiety, stress or tension
- Suppressed anger or frustration
- Aggressive, competitive or hyperactive personality type

In children, bruxism may be related to growth and development. 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. Bruxism occurs in up to 30 percent of children, often around the ages of 5 and 6. It's particularly common in

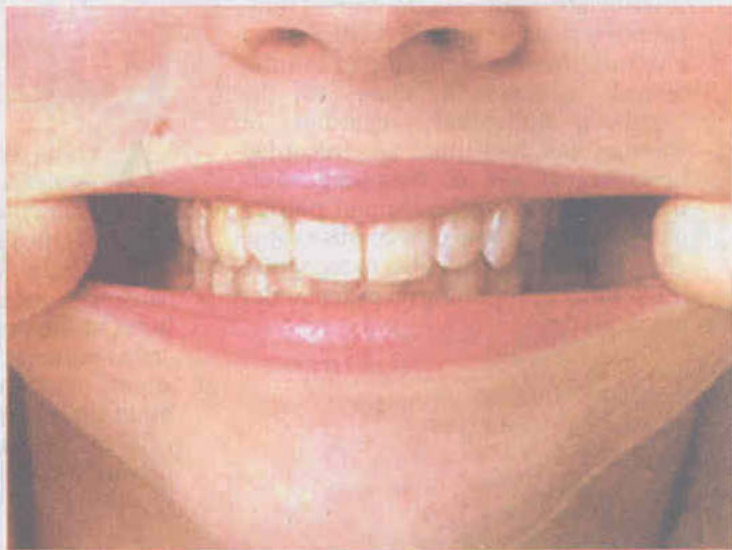
children with cerebral palsy or severe mental retardation. But most children outgrow bruxism before they get their adult teeth.

In some cases, bruxism isn't caused by stress or dental problems. It can be a complication of another disorder, such as Huntington's disease or Parkinson's disease. It can also be an uncommon side effect of some psychiatric medications including antidepressants.

*These factors increase your risk of bruxism:*

- Stress. Increased anxiety or stress can lead to teeth grinding. So can anger and frustration.

# Living with Bruxism



- Age. Bruxism is common in young children, but usually goes away by age 10. In adults, the condition is common between the late teen years and the 40s. It tends to decrease with older age.
- Caffeine, nicotine and other drugs. Using caffeine, tobacco, cocaine or amphetamines seems to increase the risk of bruxism.

Because bruxism often goes unnoticed, be aware of its signs and symptoms. See your doctor or dentist if you have worn teeth or pain in your jaw, face or ear.

If you notice that your child is grinding his or her teeth or has other signs or symptoms of this condition