Ways to Manage Teeth Grinding (Bruxism) | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/ways-to-manage-grinding-teeth/

Details:

Teeth grinding, also called bruxism, is the involuntary clenching or grinding of the upper and lower teeth against each other. It can happen during the day or at night while you sleep. Stress, genetics, lifestyle habits, the way your teeth meet and sleep disorders can all play a part. At Core Dental we recommend a dental assessment first, because management depends on the cause and on any wear already present. Options can include relaxation techniques, a custom night guard and jaw care.

What is teeth grinding (bruxism)?

Bruxism is the clenching or grinding of your teeth without meaning to. Some people do it while awake, often when concentrating or feeling tense. Others do it only during sleep and may not know until a partner hears it or a dentist notices wear on the teeth. Because it is involuntary, it can be hard to stop through willpower alone.

What causes teeth grinding?

Grinding usually has more than one contributing factor. Common ones include:

Psychological factors: stress and anxiety from life situations or from anxiety-related disorders.

Biological factors: genetics, so grinding can run in families.

External influences: smoking, caffeine intake, alcohol consumption and certain drugs.

Dental factors: an abnormal bite, where the upper and lower teeth do not meet properly.

Sleep disorders: conditions such as sleep apnoea.

Your dentist can help work out which of these may apply to you, and may suggest you speak with your doctor about factors outside the mouth.

What are the signs that someone may have bruxism?

Signs and symptoms of bruxism can include:

waking up with a sore jaw or a headache

tenderness around the jaw joint, which sits on either side of the head in front of the ears

tight and tender jaw muscles

a general aching feeling in the teeth

frequent tension headaches and earaches

teeth that look jagged or feel sharp

fillings that tend to chip or fall out

Not everyone has every sign, and some of these symptoms can have other causes. A dental examination helps to tell them apart.

What is the first step in managing teeth grinding?

The first step is to see your dentist. At Core Dental we ask about your symptoms, assess how your jaw joint is working, and look for signs of tooth wear inside your mouth. This helps us to decide on a suitable way to manage the habit and to protect your teeth in the meantime. You can book at any of our nine clinics.

What can happen if you continue to grind your teeth?

If grinding is not managed, problems can build up over time. These can include:

teeth wearing down and looking flatter and shorter, because of the constant forces placed on them

teeth becoming sensitive and tender as the protective outer enamel is worn away

teeth, fillings and crowns cracking, chipping or breaking

jaw joint problems, including pain, stiffness, locking and clicking

continuous headaches

other facial pain, which can sometimes spread to cause earaches, neck aches and shoulder pain

How can stress-related teeth grinding be managed?

Stress and anxiety are common causes of grinding, so stress management and relaxation techniques can help with the underlying cause. Many people find that regular exercise, a wind-down routine before bed and cutting back on caffeine and alcohol in the evening are useful starting points. If stress or anxiety feels hard to manage, it is worth speaking with your doctor. Relaxation does not replace a dental assessment, particularly if your teeth already show wear.

What can you do to reduce grinding and protect your teeth?

It can be difficult to stop grinding altogether. There are, however, steps that may reduce the habit and help prevent further damage to your teeth.

Dental splint (night guard)

To protect your teeth and dental work, a dentist can make you a custom dental splint, also called a night guard. It is made of a rigid or soft acrylic material and fits inside your mouth. It is usually worn every night before bed. Because it separates your upper teeth from your lower teeth, it helps protect them from grinding during the night, and it can also help relax your jaw muscles. You can read more in our article on dental splints .

Give your jaw a rest

Your dentist can also suggest exercises and habits to ease jaw pain. These can include warm heat packs, limiting wide mouth opening and avoiding chewing gum. In some cases, medication to help relax the jaw muscles may be needed, and this would be a decision for your doctor or dentist after an assessment.

What should you ask your dentist about teeth grinding?

It helps to tell us when you notice symptoms, whether you wake with a sore jaw or headache, and about any medicines, caffeine, alcohol or smoking habits. You may want to ask whether you have signs of wear, whether a night guard would suit you, how it should be cared for, and how often your teeth and bite should be reviewed. Recommendations depend on an individual examination and diagnosis.

How can we help?

If you think you may be grinding your teeth, our team can examine your teeth and jaw and talk through your options at any of our nine Core Dental practices. Call 13 13 16 or book online. You may also like our articles on how to stop grinding your teeth and what to avoid if you have sensitive teeth .

How common grinding is, and who usually notices it

Grinding is described in the published advice as a common involuntary habit rather than a disorder, and the detail about who spots it explains why so many people are unaware.

The Victorian Department of Health: "Bruxism is the involuntary clenching, grinding and gnashing of the teeth. About half of the population does it from time to time. Around 5% of the population grind their teeth regularly. Often it happens during sleep, but some people grind their teeth when they are awake."

Involuntary is the operative word. It is not a habit anyone chooses, which is why "stop doing it" is not advice.

And it is usually reported by someone else. "Usually, a person doesn't realise that they grind their teeth in their sleep. The partner who shares their bed (and hears the grinding noises at night) is often the first to notice the problem. Parents may also hear it in their sleeping children."

On stress. "Teeth grinding can be a result of stress. For example, some people grind their teeth when they are angry, concentrating hard or feeling anxious."

The symptoms, in the Department's own words. "Headache, jaw joint and/or ear pain"; "aching teeth, particularly just after waking up"; "aching and/or stiffness of the face and temples just after waking up"; "aching or stiffness in the jaws while chewing, particularly during breakfast"; "clenching the jaw when angry, anxious or concentrating"; "teeth that are sensitive to hot, cold or sweetness"; "cracked or chipped tooth"; "tooth indentations on the tongue"; "raised tissue on the inside of the cheek caused by biting"; "loose teeth."

Three of those are recognisable without a dentist: stiffness on waking, stiffness during breakfast specifically, and indentations on the tongue.

What it does over time. The Department's list: "cracked tooth"; "more wear and tear on the teeth than is normal"; "broken teeth or broken restorations (for example, fillings)"; "strain on the jaw joint (temporomandibular joint)"; "pain or limited movement in the jaw joint"; "sore jaw muscles"; "teeth being more sensitive to hot and cold things"; "tooth loss (rare)"; "enlargement of the jaw muscles (rare)."

Note that the two most alarming items are marked rare by the Department itself.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Teeth grinding, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 17 October 2025). Accessed 6 November 2026.

The risk factors, and what management actually consists of

The published risk factors are mostly things that can be changed, and the published management list is mostly not dental. Both are worth knowing before assuming the answer is an appliance.

The risk factors , verbatim: "Stress and anxiety"; "Alcohol"; "Smoking"; "Caffeine"; "Snoring"; "Obstructive Sleep Apnoea"; "Drugs: antidepressants, anti-psychotics, amphetamines, cocaine."

Snoring and obstructive sleep apnoea on that list is the item most often missed, and it points somewhere other than the mouth. The Department adds: "Your dentist or other oral health professional can assess the influence of these factors."

The management list, which is almost entirely behavioural : "stress management therapy"; "relaxation techniques"; "cognitive behaviour therapy"; "hypnotherapy"; "good sleep hygiene"; "regular exercise."

Six items, none of them a device. healthdirect, the Australian Government's health information service, points the same way for jaw problems — "relaxation techniques to help relieve stress and anxiety. A psychologist can teach you how to use these techniques" — and notes that with jaw dysfunction "you may notice your symptoms are worse when you are stressed or anxious".

The treatment options the Department lists , which include two assessment steps before any appliance: "repair of tooth damage"; "ruling out other types of tooth wear such as erosion"; "assessing risk factors including sleep disordered breathing"; and "a special mouthguard ('bite splint') to wear at night to protect your teeth."

Ruling out erosion first matters, because the Department's erosion page describes a different cause of the same wear: acid "can also soften the tooth surface, making it easier for it to be worn away by abrasion or teeth grinding. This is known as acid wear or erosive tooth wear." Wear from grinding and wear from acid look similar and need different responses — and where both are present, the Department suggests you "wear a custom-made dental splint if you grind your teeth at night".

The caveat that has to travel with any splint. "In most cases, a bite splint will only help with the symptoms and will not stop you from grinding altogether."

Help with the symptoms, not stop the grinding. No source we have read gives a success rate for a splint, and we are not going to publish one.

On children, the published position is reassuring and specific. "Because children's teeth and jaws change and grow so quickly it's not usually a damaging habit that requires treatment and most outgrow it as they get older." Its risk factors in children are "pain when teeth are coming through"; "emotional stress and anxiety"; "medications such as antidepressants, anti-psychotics"; and "medical conditions such as cerebral palsy, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)."

And on deciding what to do: "The management of teeth grinding in children depends on the amount of wear on the teeth, the child's age, the symptoms experienced and the needs of the child and parent or care giver. A dentist or other oral health professional is best placed to make a full assessment of each child's situation."

One thing this page cannot do. Grinding is one listed cause of jaw joint pain, not the only one. healthdirect's causes of TMJ dysfunction also include "an injury to your jaw, head or neck", "an uneven bite", "wear and tear of your TMJ, usually caused by osteoarthritis", "other joint diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis or gout", and dental work that changes your bite — plus the note that "you might have TMJ dysfunction without any obvious cause". Jaw pain is worth having assessed rather than attributed.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Teeth grinding, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 17 October 2025); Dental erosion, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025); healthdirect (Australian Government), Temporomandibular joint dysfunction, healthdirect.gov.au (the page states it was last reviewed November 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Is teeth grinding the same as bruxism?

Yes. Bruxism is the medical name for grinding or clenching the teeth. It can happen during the day or at night, and it is involuntary, so many people are unaware they are doing it.

Can teeth grinding damage my teeth?

It can. Over time grinding may wear teeth down, make them sensitive, and chip or crack teeth, fillings and crowns. A dentist can check for signs of wear and suggest ways to protect your teeth.

Does a night guard stop me grinding?

A night guard does not necessarily stop the grinding habit. It separates the upper and lower teeth so that they are protected from wear, and it can help relax the jaw muscles. Your dentist can advise whether one suits you.

Can stress cause jaw pain and headaches?

Stress is a common contributor to grinding and clenching, which can lead to a sore jaw and tension headaches. Other conditions can cause similar symptoms, so it is sensible to have them assessed by a dentist or doctor.

Should I see a dentist if I wake with a sore jaw?

Yes, it is a good idea. A sore jaw or headache on waking can be a sign of night-time grinding. Your dentist can assess your jaw joint and teeth and talk through options.

How common is teeth grinding?

The Victorian Department of Health: "About half of the population does it from time to time. Around 5% of the population grind their teeth regularly."

Why do most people not know they do it?

Because it happens in sleep. "Usually, a person doesn't realise that they grind their teeth in their sleep. The partner who shares their bed (and hears the grinding noises at night) is often the first to notice the problem."

What symptoms would I notice myself?

Several on the Department's list are self-evident: "aching teeth, particularly just after waking up"; "aching and/or stiffness of the face and temples just after waking up"; "aching or stiffness in the jaws while chewing, particularly during breakfast"; "teeth that are sensitive to hot, cold or sweetness"; and "tooth indentations on the tongue".

What damage can grinding cause?

"Cracked tooth"; "more wear and tear on the teeth than is normal"; "broken teeth or broken restorations (for example, fillings)"; "strain on the jaw joint (temporomandibular joint)"; "pain or limited movement in the jaw joint"; "sore jaw muscles"; "teeth being more sensitive to hot and cold things". The Department marks "tooth loss" and "enlargement of the jaw muscles" as rare.

What makes grinding more likely?

"Stress and anxiety"; "Alcohol"; "Smoking"; "Caffeine"; "Snoring"; "Obstructive Sleep Apnoea"; and "Drugs: antidepressants, anti-psychotics, amphetamines, cocaine." The Department adds that "your dentist or other oral health professional can assess the influence of these factors".

Could snoring be connected?

Snoring and obstructive sleep apnoea are both on the Department's risk factor list, and one of its treatment steps is "assessing risk factors including sleep disordered breathing".

What does management actually involve?

Mostly behaviour change. The Department's list is "stress management therapy"; "relaxation techniques"; "cognitive behaviour therapy"; "hypnotherapy"; "good sleep hygiene"; "regular exercise."

Will a splint stop me grinding?

No. "In most cases, a bite splint will only help with the symptoms and will not stop you from grinding altogether." No source we have read gives a success rate for one.

Why would erosion need ruling out first?

Because it causes similar wear for a different reason. "Ruling out other types of tooth wear such as erosion" is one of the Department's listed treatment steps, and its erosion page notes that acid "can also soften the tooth surface, making it easier for it to be worn away by abrasion or teeth grinding".

My child grinds their teeth. Should I worry?

The published position is reassuring: "Because children's teeth and jaws change and grow so quickly it's not usually a damaging habit that requires treatment and most outgrow it as they get older." What to do depends on the individual child, and "a dentist or other oral health professional is best placed to make a full assessment of each child's situation".

What causes grinding in children?

"Pain when teeth are coming through"; "emotional stress and anxiety"; "medications such as antidepressants, anti-psychotics"; and "medical conditions such as cerebral palsy, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)."

Does jaw pain mean I am grinding?

Not necessarily. Grinding is one listed cause among several. healthdirect also lists "an injury to your jaw, head or neck", "an uneven bite", "wear and tear of your TMJ, usually caused by osteoarthritis", "other joint diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis or gout", and dental work that changes your bite — and notes that "you might have TMJ dysfunction without any obvious cause".

Related services and further reading

General dentistry

Dental check-ups

Sleep dentistry

Dental splints and why a dentist may recommend them

Do you need a splint? When your dentist may recommend one

How can I stop grinding my teeth?

4 things to avoid if you have sensitive teeth

Brushing teeth right

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week, with Monday to Friday hours to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online through your practice page, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday mornings, Sunday closed

If you have uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, or a serious facial injury, call 000 immediately.

This article is general in nature and does not replace advice from a registered dental practitioner who has examined you. Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

What is bruxism?

Bruxism is the involuntary clenching or grinding of the upper and lower teeth. At Core Dental we see it presenting during the day or at night, and a dental examination can show whether wear on your teeth suggests it.

What causes people to grind their teeth?

Grinding can involve stress and anxiety, genetics, smoking, caffeine, alcohol, certain drugs, an abnormal bite and sleep disorders such as sleep apnoea. Our Core Dental dentists can help work out which factors may apply to you.

What symptoms suggest night-time teeth grinding?

Waking with a sore jaw or headache, tender jaw muscles, aching teeth, earaches, sharp-feeling teeth and fillings that chip or fall out can suggest grinding. Core Dental dentists can examine your teeth and jaw joint to assess this.

What happens if grinding is left untreated?

Teeth can wear flatter and shorter, become sensitive, and teeth, fillings and crowns may crack or chip. Jaw joint pain, clicking, headaches and facial pain can also develop. Core Dental recommends an assessment early.

What is a night guard and who makes it?

A night guard, or dental splint, is a custom rigid or soft acrylic appliance worn over the teeth at night. A Core Dental dentist can assess whether one suits you and arrange it after an examination.

What jaw care can a dentist suggest for grinding?

A dentist may suggest warm heat packs, limiting wide mouth opening and avoiding chewing gum. In some cases, muscle-relaxing medication may be considered. Your Core Dental dentist can advise after an assessment.

How do I book an appointment about teeth grinding at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. Tell the Core Dental team about your jaw symptoms and we will arrange an examination at one of our nine clinics.

What are Core Dental opening hours for a jaw or teeth check?

Core Dental clinics are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and on Saturday mornings, closed Sunday. Bayside opens at 8.30am on Saturdays. Call 13 13 16 to find a time.