



## How to Keep Your Teeth Healthy if You Grind Them in Your Sleep

By Jessica Estrada | November 3, 2018



If you're really into oral hygiene (as we all should be), you may have switched to a holistic dentist, ditched the fluoride for homemade toothpaste, or concocted a turmeric and coconut oil "mask" to keep your pearly whites looking good. But teeth grinding, otherwise known as bruxism, is one bad habit that you could still be partaking in without even knowing it.

It's actually a very common issue at any age, says **Beverly Hills-based cosmetic dentist Bill Dorfman, DDS**. Although the grinding mainly goes down at night while you're sleeping, it can also happen during the day.

So if you fall into the former category, *how* do you know if you're grinding your teeth at night? Asking your significant other or a loved one (one that is totally cool with creepily watching you sleep) is a good place to start, Dr. Dorfman says. However, the only way to know for sure is to ask your dentist. "A trained dentist will be able to look at your teeth and know instantly just by the wear patterns on your teeth," he says.

Before you pencil in an appointment with your dentist—which you should be doing regularly anyway because, hygiene—noting your symptoms, if any, can also give you a good indication of whether you're engaging in bruxism while you snooze. Things like headaches, migraines, and stiffness in the jaw can all be telltale signs, says Dr. Dorfman.

Tooth damage is also a major red flag, says Timothy Chase, DMD, a New York-based cosmetic dentist at SmilesNY. Other signs he recommends looking out for include a clicking jaw, tender teeth, temperature sensitivity, and even receding gums.

So how to stop grinding teeth? Well, there's some bad news: Once a teeth grinder, always a teeth grinder. Meaning, you'll forever be prone to the bad habit, Dr. Chase says. So even though you can't actually put a permanent stop to the grinding, there are things you can do to stop it from further damaging your teeth and reducing some of the symptoms.

Read on for everything you need to know about teeth grinding.

Why am I grinding my teeth at night—and is it *that* big of a deal?

If your symptoms of bruxism aren't that bad, you might be tempted to just ignore the problem. But grinding your teeth actually *is* worth losing a little sleep over—it can be seriously destructive,

There are many different theories behind what, exactly, causes teeth grinding. Some believe it's because of misaligned teeth, Dr. Chase says. Others blame it on stress, which can cause you to squeeze and clench your jaw, both during the day and at night. It's also been linked to sleeping disorders like sleep apnea.

Whatever the cause, rubbing your teeth together can cause the enamel to wear down. When this happens, dentin—the tissue underneath the enamel, which is way softer—becomes exposed and your teeth start to wear down even faster.

"It's kind of like a ball rolling down a hill," Dr. Chase says. "It's going to pick up speed and you're going to lose more and more tooth structure over time." And if you're a severe grinder, you could even be at risk for exposing the nerve of your tooth. (Ouch!)

And it's not just your actual teeth that can pay the price. The entire framework of your mouth and face can be compromised, too, Dr. Chase says. Since our teeth are what essentially keep the jaw separated, the more they wear, the closer and closer your upper and lower jaws get (and your nose and chin, too). Basically, you end up looking like grandma without her dentures.

If things get real bad, crowns, veneers, or even implants may be required to restore your sparkly smile. And if your teeth changed positions, braces might be needed as well to move them back.

How to stop grinding teeth from doing too much damage

#### 1. Get your bite checked

The first point of action Dr. Chase suggests is getting your bite examined by your dentist. This will ensure that there aren't any areas where your teeth are coming together incorrectly. He also recommends asking for a Disclusion Time Reduction (DTR) procedure, which is a treatment that includes an electronic computer bite analysis and a measurement of the muscle activity in the mouth.

This therapy helps reduce the stress on your teeth by balancing them and ensuring that chewing is as smooth as possible, so the muscles are able to relax and thus ease the symptoms of grinding. Not all dentists have access to or are trained in using the high-tech machines needed for the procedure, but it can be worth looking into.

## 2. Wear a night guard

Wearing a night guard is one of the best ways to treat teeth grinding, Dr. Dorfman says. It creates a barrier, so even though the grinding is probably still going to happen, at least your teeth will be protected.

You can grab a night guard over the counter for pretty cheap. They're usually made out of plastic or rubber and you can boil them and shape them to your teeth.

While an OTC guard can protect your teeth, if you deal with muscle soreness in your jaw, it might not be the best idea. "It's like putting in a chew toy," Dr. Chase says. In other words, having something chewy in your mouth all night is going to make you clamp down even more and thus leave your jaw feeling super sore in the morning.

The best option, especially in severe cases, is to have a guard custom-made. Yes, it's going to be more expensive, but having to replace your teeth in 10 years will be even more so. The cool thing about a personalized guard is that it'll be made specifically to address your issues and symptoms. Plus, the fit will be better and way more comfortable.

That said, I know a night guard isn't the sexiest thing to wear to bed (especially if you're trying to heat things up between the sheets), but you know what isn't sexy either? Damaged teeth.

## 3. Get Botox on your jaw muscles

Turns out Botox isn't just for smoothing out wrinkles. Both Dr. Dorfman and Dr. Chase recommend getting a little bit of the drug injected in your jaw to relax the muscles and decrease the grinding.

However, Dr. Chase says, the effects of Botox do wear off, which means you'd have to go back and have it done again and again. But hey, since preliminary research has proven its effectiveness for teeth grinding, it could be worth a shot. (No pun intended.)

## 4. Try not to clench your teeth during the day

Dr. Chase also advises trying not to clench your jaw when you're awake. Instead, make sure you're keeping your lips together but your teeth apart. Yes, it is easier said than done, but it can help manage the symptoms. (And you can always use another excuse to take a few more meditation breaks during your work day, right?)

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