



THE NIGHTLY GRIND

FOUR SIGNS A MOUTHGUARD MAY BE RIGHT FOR YOU

When you think of mouthguards, what comes to mind? Maybe you envision the custom-made pink mouthguard your daughter wears playing field hockey to protect her teeth and match her cleats. Or maybe you're picturing the mouthguards you've seen worn in the boxing ring or flashing across your television screen during "Monday Night Football." But if you think mouthguards are just for athletes, you might want to think again.

While mouthguards are an essential piece of equipment to prevent sports-related injuries to the mouth and jaw (and protect against head and neck injuries by cushioning blows), they can also help adults who suffer from bruxism—the clinical term for teeth grinding. Many people grind their teeth while sleeping, so they may not know they are doing it. According to the National Sleep Foundation, bruxism affects about 8% of adults.

Some factors believed to contribute to teeth grinding include stress, anxiety, certain medications such as anti-depressants, misaligned teeth that are making your jaw unstable, and sleep apnea.

Teeth grinding can be an occasional issue that may not be harmful, or it could be a chronic habit that leads to more serious problems. In the long term, teeth grinding can shorten your teeth by wearing down the enamel, and it can loosen your teeth or cause a tooth to fracture or fall out. You could end up needing dentures, implants, or root canals as a result.

If your teeth grinding is a nightly occurrence, your dentist may recommend a custom-made nightguard to protect your teeth. These are mouthguards that can be worn to bed at night to act as a buffer between the upper and lower teeth, absorbing the pressure of biting and preventing your teeth from grinding together. Here are four signs that a mouthguard could be right for you:

YOU WAKE UP WITH A HEADACHE

If you frequently wake up with a headache in the morning, it could stem from pressure placed on your jaws while grinding at night. The headaches could be mild or intense, with the pain typically centered around the sides and back of the head.

YOU SUFFER FROM JAW PAIN, FACIAL SORENESS, OR EARACHES

Teeth grinding can put strain on your jaw muscles, causing inflammation. If you grind your teeth at night, your jaw may feel stiff when you wake up in the morning. Your face may ache, making it difficult for you to open your mouth. You may also experience clicking or popping when you talk or chew. Bruxism can also cause earaches, tinnitus (ringing or buzzing in the ears), and even hearing loss.

YOU HAVE VISIBLE SIGNS OF WEAR

When teeth come together and grind back and forth, it puts a lot of pressure on the enamel. Persistent grinding can wear down tooth enamel, exposing your teeth to sensitivity. It can also result in visible signs of strain, such as front teeth that look shorter, teeth with cracks in them, molars that look flat on top, and molars with pits in them.

YOU CHIP A TOOTH

Teeth can cave to the constant pressure of grinding and end up cracked or fractured, which can be expensive to fix or even require extraction. If you've chipped a tooth but don't know how it happened, it may be the result of teeth grinding that needs to be addressed.

If you have any of these signs and symptoms of teeth grinding, talk to your dentist. He or she will examine your teeth to determine what's causing your bruxism and recommend treatment options.

While a nightguard won't treat the underlying cause of teeth grinding or stop the clenching of your jaw, it can help minimize the negative effects on your teeth and prevent further damage to your oral health.

