

Bruxism

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. However, some individuals only grind their teeth during REM sleep (dreaming sleep), which mostly occurs in the second half of the night.

TEETH GRINDING IN BABIES

Almost 50% of babies grind their teeth. It usually begins at about age 10 months, after the baby has her deciduous incisors (the two top front teeth and the two bottom front teeth). Some babies only grind their teeth sporadically, 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 her teeth. However, if the teeth grinding is worrisome or if there are any changes in your child's teeth, do see a dentist. Some babies are less likely to grind their teeth while lying on their side, so you can try turning a baby and putting her on her side to fall asleep or once she is asleep.

TEETH GRINDING IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Bruxism also occurs in older children and adolescents, usually beginning after age 10 years. 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. Teeth grinding is also more common in children with disabilities, especially those with cerebral palsy and mental retardation. In addition to teeth grinding, other symptoms may include teeth pain, temporomandibular joint pain, and headaches. Furthermore, dental erosion can be a concern with frequent bruxism. Finally, stress is likely to result in increased bruxism.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT BRUXISM

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