

CLENCHING AND GRINDING Can Take a Toll on Your Teeth.

Explore some handy approaches
to managing bruxism during stressful times.

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Do you find yourself to be more stressed in these trying times? If so, your teeth may show it. When stressed, your jaw muscles tend to tighten, resulting in teeth grinding and/or clenching (also called bruxism). While this can happen without you even realizing it, it can be very dangerous to your teeth. There are lots of techniques you can use to lessen the effects of bruxism. Below we will suggest some exercises to stretch your jaw muscles and reduce tension in your jaw.

Mouth guards are typically what a dentist will prescribe to those suffering from bruxism. However, there are many exercises that you can use in combination (or as an alternative) to using a mouth guard.



JAW EXERCISES

Open your mouth as wide as you can without being uncomfortable and touch your tongue to your front teeth. This will immediately relax your jaw muscles.

Do your best to be conscious of your top and bottom teeth coming in contact with each other (except when eating). If you have a hard time doing this, try saying the letter “n”, which will position your tongue. Keep your mouth in this position to avoid clenching/grinding.



SELF-MASSAGE

Massage your jaw to help the jaw muscles to relax and decrease any tension you are feeling.

Hold a warm towel on your jaw to help with muscle relaxation.





NUTRITION

Creating a personalized nutrition plan will help those who suffer from bruxism.

Do your best to decrease your intake of caffeine and alcohol. These are substances that can increase clenching and grinding.

Consume more soft foods as opposed to “tough to chew” or hard items.

RELAXATION PRACTICES

Bruxism is known to be directly related to stress. Using stress-relieving practices can help to reduce stress, thus becoming a successful way to fight bruxism.

Practice meditation, tai chi, yoga, professional massage, deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, etc.





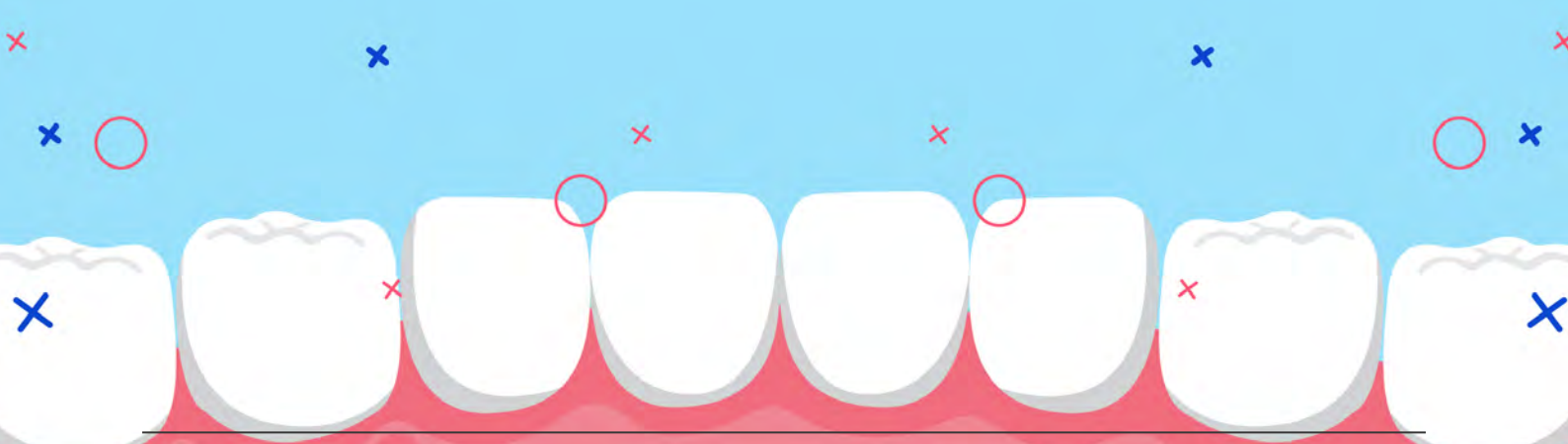
Our bodies respond to stressful events, so in times like these, grinding and clenching incidents increase. Stress causes our bodies to go into fight-or-flight mode, releasing hormones into the body. Those stress hormones that are released activate muscle movement because that energy has to be released somehow. Hence, the more stressed we feel, the more of a chance we will harm our teeth. And once the damage is done, it can be costly to fix. From a night mouthguard (also called an occlusal splint) to veneers, bruxism has seen a rise in costs to help with pain and teeth sensitivity.

While bruxism is not a dental disorder but originates from stress, it can affect not only your teeth but also your entire craniofacial structure.

Especially for those who clench and grind in their sleep. It is said that most individuals with bruxism will grind and clench at least 40 minutes out of every hour they sleep. This will eventually (but quickly) fracture your teeth, erode the enamel, affect your bite and damage your temporomandibular joint (the hinge of your jaw). It will also damage the masseter muscle (the muscle that controls the jaw). All of this will eventually evolve into headaches (migraines), earaches, facial pain and TMJ.

There are other treatments for more extensive cases which includes hypnosis, acupuncture, medical massage and Botox injections. Some dentists will also prescribe a muscle relaxer to take before bed. For those who don't have it quite as extensively, something as simple as destressing prior to bedtime has been known to help a bit. One tip is not to watch the news before bed!

Teeth grinding and clenching is a hard habit to break. And destressing is easier said than done. However, doing nothing will result in a lot of pain and cost.

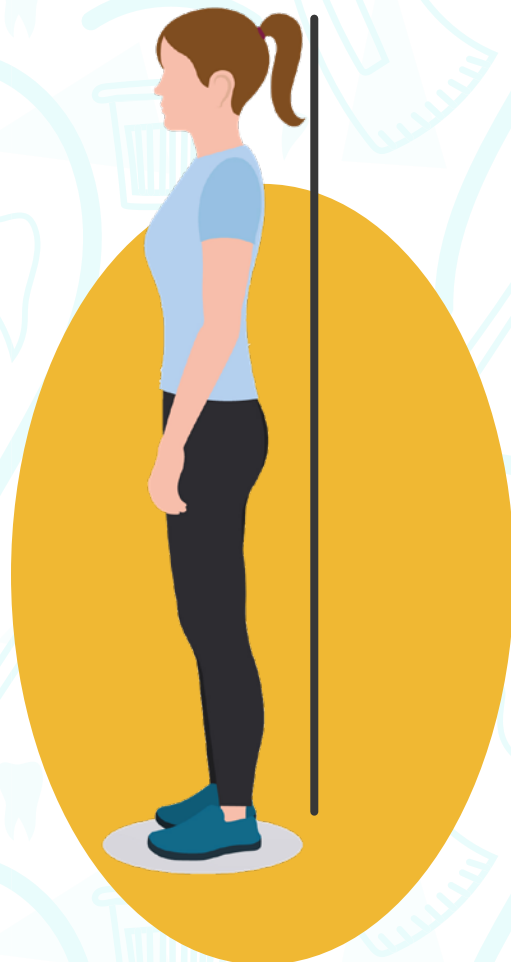


Below are some exercises to help with destressing and gentle stretching of the jaw. These exercises are also excellent for TMJ and popping of the jaw.

POSTURAL ALIGNMENT

Postural alignment plays a huge part in jaw abnormalities. Do you sit at your desk with the phone to your ear and your head tilted to one side all day? Do you tend to lean forward with your head dropping down? Postural exercises will help to pull the head back and draw your shoulders into a more natural position. This helps to relieve stiffness and other symptoms.

- Stand against the wall with your back and shoulder blades touching the wall.
- Push your shoulder blades together to bring the shoulders back as far as you can. And let them back down to normal.
- Tuck your chin down and then bring your head back to touch the wall.
- Hold your position for 30 seconds or so.
- Release.
- Repeat 4 or 5 times.



TONGUE EXERCISE

This is just a little different from the tongue exercise we told you about earlier. This helps with grinding, clenching and to stop the clicking in your jaw.

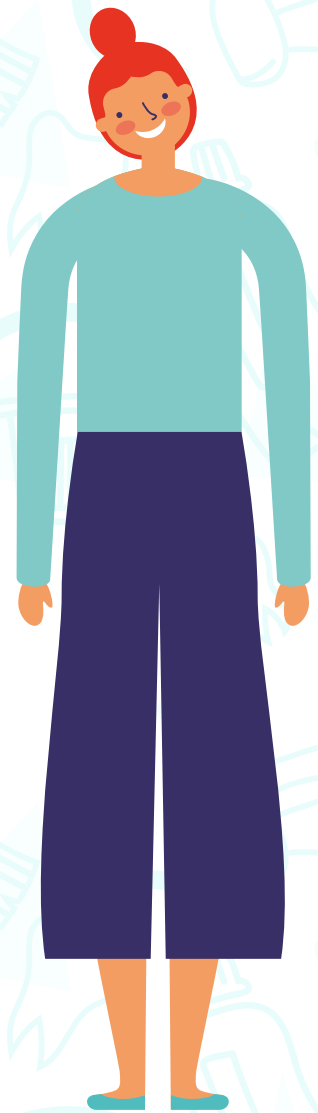


- Rest your back teeth together (gently).
- Take the tip of your tongue and rest it behind the front teeth.
- Now take your tongue and curl it along the roof of the mouth as far back as you can go comfortably.
- Hold your tongue in this position and open your mouth slowly.
- Hold the position.
- Keep this position for five seconds.
- Relax for five seconds.
- Repeat 7 to 10 times.

NECK STRETCHES

Prior to doing any neck stretches, sit up tall with your spine straight. Look straight ahead and relax your jaw.

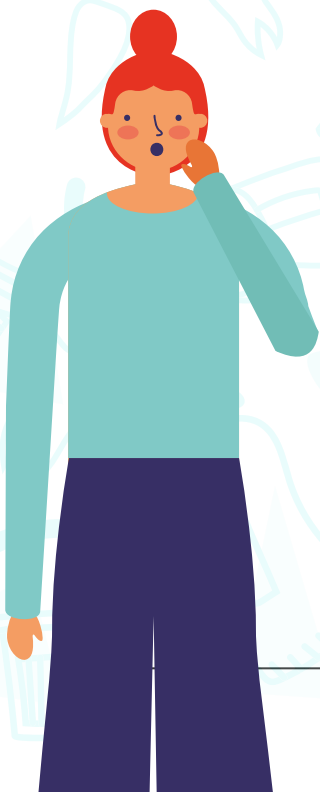
- You'll want to sit in a comfortable position with your head and shoulders in a neutral position.
- Bend your head forward and press your hand (gently) against the back of your head so that you can increase your stretch.
- Hold this stretch for at least 30 seconds. Return to position.
- Looking up, extend your chin to the ceiling. Hold for at least 30 seconds. Release.
- Bend your head to the right and press the left side of your head (gently) to get a good stretch.
- Hold this position for at least 30 seconds.
- Repeat the same exercise on the right side.
- Going clockwise, turn your head in circular motions at least 4 times. Then repeat counterclockwise.



JAW STRETCHES

These jaw stretches will help you to release those tight jaw muscles and begin to reorient your jaw back to its natural position.

- Get into a comfortable sitting position. Open your mouth as wide as you comfortably can.
- Press your hand (gently) against the front of your jaw to stretch.
- Hold that position for at least 30 seconds.
- Stop if it is painful.
- Slide your jaw to the left and use your hand to press (gently) against the right side.
- Hold this position for at least 30 seconds. Same as above, if you feel pain – stop.
- Slide your jaw to the right, press, hold 30 seconds, release.
- Repeat 4 to 5 times.





TRIGGER POINT INJECTIONS

If worse comes to worse and nothing else is working, trigger point injections are another option.

If you've ever felt somewhat of a "muscle knot" or a nodule in the back of your neck or shoulders, this is called trigger points or areas of muscle spasm or tension. These knots often radiate pain when touched and are often caused by myofascial pain due to clenching and grinding.

Patients who experience bruxism may feel pain in the temporomandibular joint, face or neck muscles surrounding the jaw. This can ultimately lead to popping or clicking of the jaw and facial pain while chewing.

Trigger point injections are given in the tender muscle area and can relieve pain when other methods do not work.

Some trigger point injections contain an anesthetic and some contain a corticosteroid.

Sometimes no medication is involved. You will have to consult with your doctor to find out which is best for you and your individual situation. No matter which one you choose, the needle will break up the tension in the trigger point and give you relief for a specific amount of time before you have to go back.

Note: depending on the severity of pain, some patients only need to go for one shot to feel better, some will have to have multiple sessions.

BRUXISM IN CHILDREN

Bruxism in children can be a little different than it is in adults. This is because we are really not clear on exactly what causes bruxism in little ones. Although misaligned teeth are usually a good first indicator, some children grind their teeth when they are in pain.

Some children grind their teeth to help relieve stress and/or anxiety. Clenching and grinding also happens with a child who is hyperactive, has cerebral palsy or is taking certain medications.

While bruxism in children can cause earaches, headaches, jaw pain and facial pain, and you want to help with those symptoms, you also want to keep an eye on their teeth, making sure to see a dentist who will check for chipping teeth or wearing down of the tooth enamel. Even if your child still has their primary teeth, it is extremely vital to know if they have this condition and treat it accordingly before too much damage is done.

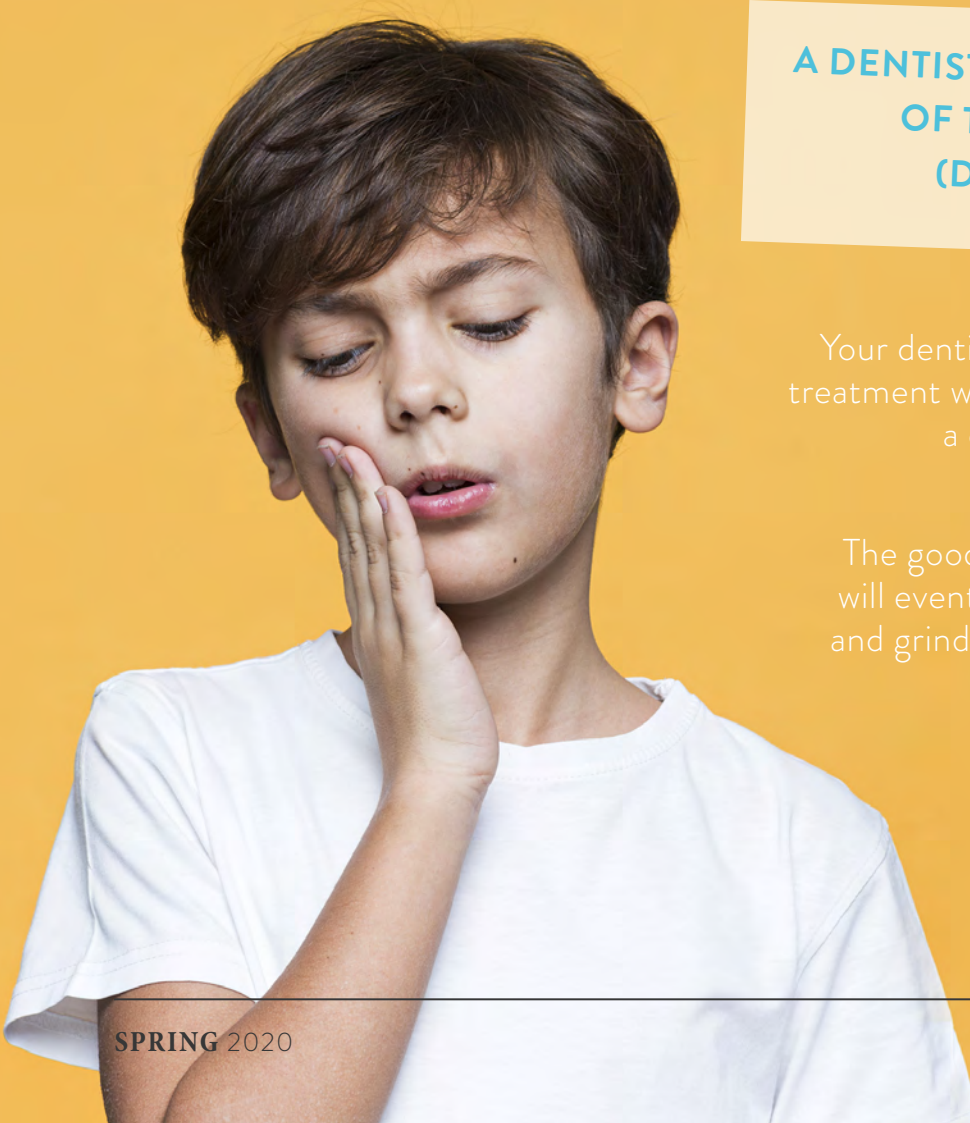


Determining If Your Child Has It

This can be complicated because some children don't even realize that they are clenching and grinding and if you don't see it, how will you know?

If you suspect bruxism in your child, check in on them during the night. See if you can hear them making grinding noises while sleeping. If they share the room with a sibling, ask them if they have noticed anything. If your child ever complains about jaw pain in general or while eating, this is a good sign that you should have them checked for bruxism.

Try to talk to your child to see if he or she have been particularly stressed lately, especially during these tough times. If so, it's time to pay attention and get them the help they need before it goes too far. Bruxism can be very damaging to your child's teeth and jaw. Seeing a dentist is a good start. Managing their emotions and doing stress relief activities and/or jaw exercises are also vital. With a child, a warm bath at night is great, together with some soothing music to relax before bedtime. Children experience lots of anxiety in general, but this year in particular may be especially stressful for them. You will need to address the root cause and intervene through dental treatment and stress relief.



**A DENTIST GETS TO THE ROOT
OF THE PROBLEM.
(Dental Humor!)**

Your dentist will discuss diagnosis and treatment with you and may even order a custom-made mouth guard to wear at night.

The good news is that most children will eventually grow out of clenching and grinding. However, don't assume they will. Stay on top of it through your dentist.

And be safe!