

Bruxism (teeth-grinding)

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.

Teeth grinding in babies

Almost 50% of babies grind their teeth. It usually begins at about age 10 months, after a baby has their two top front and two bottom front teeth (deciduous incisors). Some babies only grind their teeth a little bit, but others can do it throughout most of the night. While teeth grinding in adults can lead to dental problems, teeth grinding in babies is not a concern and it goes away on its own usually without doing any damage to the teeth. However, if the teeth grinding is worrisome or if there are any changes in your child's teeth, do see a dentist.

Teeth grinding in children and adolescents

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.

A condition called "Obstructive sleep apnea" (airway blocking that occurs during sleep) can trigger teeth grinding. If your child has snoring, mouth breathing or signs of apnea (pauses in breathing), you should let your primary care provider know, as they may need further evaluation. Teeth grinding is also more common in children with disabilities, especially those with cerebral palsy and developmental delay.

Along with teeth grinding, your older child may have teeth pain, temporomandibular joint pain, and headaches. Dental erosion can be a concern with frequent teeth grinding. Finally, stress is likely to result in increased teeth grinding.

What can you do about teeth grinding?

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

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To Learn More

- Sleep Disorders Department
206-987-5072
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201. This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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