

# **Save Your Smile, Stop Grinding!**

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# Table of Contents

Introduction – What is Bruxism?  
What Happens if My Bruxism Is Not Treated?

Chapter 1: About Bruxism  
How Do I Find Out if I Suffer From Bruxism?  
The Bite Strip  
Hair Analysis

Chapter 2: What Causes Bruxism?  
Drug Induced Bruxism  
Amphetamines and Psycho Stimulants  
Antidepressants  
Bruxism Induced by Malocclusion  
Frustration, Lifestyle Stress and Anger

Chapter 3: The Best Way to Sleep  
How you should be laying in your bed

Chapter 4: Simple Relaxation Techniques  
Breathing Exercises  
Ventilation & Breathing  
More About Breathing Exercises  
Meditation  
Acquiring a Meditative Focus

Chapter 5: Oral Health in Relation to Teeth Grinding  
How Bruxism Damages Teeth  
Bruxism and Gum Damage

Chapter 6: Preventing Bruxism - Relax Your Muscles  
The warm compress  
Natural Herbs

Chapter 7: Helping Bruxism During the Day  
If Prescription Drugs are the Cause  
Relaxation and Meditation  
Caffeine, Alcohol and Nicotine Consumption  
Regular Dental and Medical Checkups

Stress Management Therapy  
Talk to Your Significant Other  
Repairing Damage to Teeth from Bruxism  
Herbal Remedies and Nutritional Supplements  
Muscle Relaxants

## Chapter 8: Jaw Muscle Exercises

Press and Clench Exercise  
The Stretch and Stretch Some More Exercise  
Hard to Open Exercise

## Chapter 9: The Nose obstruction method

The Upsides to This Method  
The Downsides to This Method  
When NOT to use This Method

Conclusion

## Introduction – What is Bruxism?

Bruxism is the involuntary clenching of your jaw, identical to the type of clenching movement your jaw makes when chewing. Of course, all people chew while they eat. This natural jaw reflex is necessary for good oral health and digestion. Unfortunately, 30 to 40 million Americans suffer from involuntary bruxism, particularly while they sleep. Most of us refer to bruxism as ‘teeth clenching’ or ‘teeth grinding’.

Bruxism may be mild or severe and can lead to jaw damage, headaches and sensitive teeth, to name only a few of the many possible side effects. No doubt this is the reason you’ve found this book.

Although chewing is normal and expected when eating, what happens for those with bruxism is an abnormal, ‘involuntary’ reflex. This means you are not consciously aware of clenching or grinding your teeth. It is easy to understand how this could happen while asleep, but some with bruxism also clench and grind their teeth when awake, even though they may not realize they are doing so.

Nerves normally controlled by the brain activate our jaw muscles. During sleep, conscious parts of the brain become dormant. That is to say, they are not actively being used. The unconscious parts of the brain govern the clenching and grinding motions typical of bruxism.

Most people will occasionally have some degree of bruxism at one point or another. However, if bruxism has become routine for you, this book will help to understand the condition, and guide you through controlling the reflex, limiting the damage it causes to your teeth, gums, jaw joints and overall oral health.

Causes of bruxism vary. For some, it’s the result of abnormal sleeping patterns. As we’ll discuss in a later chapter, your body requires a balanced sleep of both REM and NREM cycles. REM cycles are responsible for the deep sleep you are in when you dream. NREM cycles are those outside of the dream state, and this is a time when a large degree of bruxism occurs as a result of heightened subconscious activity, including involuntary nerve reflexes and muscle contraction.

Since bruxism is an oral health issue and a sleep issue, there are a few specialists, such as an orthodontist, oral surgeon or orthognatic surgeon who may be able to help you. Orthognatic surgeons correct jaw structure defects as opposed to working exclusively inside the mouth.

Of course, for most people, a visit to your general dentist is the best place to begin and can usually identify the condition. He or she may refer you to one of

the specialists mentioned above. If lack of restful sleep is an issue, your family doctor may be of assistance, and other specialist referrals may be necessary. The type of doctor you will ultimately need is determined by the cause of your bruxism.

As previously touched upon, causes of bruxism include:

- malfunctioning neurons
- drugs
- stress
- misaligned jaw (called malocclusion)
- abnormal sleep issues

A misaligned jaw may be the result of how your skeleton is naturally formed or trauma. In both cases, this results in malocclusion.

Drugs and stress can also cause bruxism. How these induce the bite reflex that causes teeth grinding will also be discussed later on in greater detail.

It is important to understand the basic causes, and to examine your own situation to identify which of these causes may or may not apply to you so you can seek the proper treatment.

### **What Happens if My Bruxism Is Not Treated?**

Usually, people who grind their teeth will do so sideways. This flattens the teeth, removing the hard outer surface of the teeth, called enamel, and dulling your teeth.

Left untreated, bruxism can cause many unwanted conditions in the mouth and jaw, including –

- tooth loss
- weakened gums
- gradually deteriorating oral health
- muscle pain
- headaches
- arthritis of the jaw
- tooth decay
- general breakdown of the teeth

Along with these symptoms, you may notice the following –

- pain in your jaw
- sensitive teeth
- overtired and sore jaw muscle
- lack of refreshing sleep, even during naps

- development of TMD (Temporomandibular Disorder), also called TMJ (Temporomandibular Joint Disorder)

If this sounds like the symptoms you are experiencing, keep reading to find out what you can do about it.

In upcoming chapters, we'll discuss ways to stop bruxism, limit the damage to your teeth, and prevent what you'll come to understand as unnecessary and preventable pain.

Let's get started.

## Chapter 1: About Bruxism

The damage to your teeth, jaw and mouth from bruxism is invisible at first. Even if you are aware that you are grinding your teeth, you may not realize you are causing damage that could become irreversible.

You should suspect bruxism if you experience the following symptoms on a regular basis –

- ✓ Your teeth ache when you wake up
- ✓ Your jaw feels tense or tight
- ✓ You experience frequent headaches
- ✓ You sleep poorly, and feel fatigued throughout the day
- ✓ Your teeth are sensitive to cold, heat and food

Bear in mind that you may not experience these symptoms all the time. For some, it takes years before symptoms are felt. In all cases of bruxism, however, advanced damage can and will follow if left untreated.

### **How Do I Find Out if I Suffer From Bruxism?**

Beyond simply suspecting you are clenching and grinding your teeth, your first step in verifying your bruxism is a visit to your dentist. A general practice dentist can determine whether you suffer from bruxism. In cases, where malocclusion is involved, your dentist may refer you to an orthodontist. Bruxism that has progressed to an advanced stage will require the consultation of an oral surgeon. All of these professionals can provide advice on steps you can take to limit the damage, and ultimately, correct the problem.

### **The Bite Strip**

There are also tests available that you can complete at home. One of these is a device known as a Bite Strip. This product detects movement within your jaw during sleep, virtually running a diagnostic test while you sleep.

The Bite Strip is a disposable, one-time-use device that tests whether you suffer from bruxism. It requires a minimum of four and a half hours in order to complete the test. The test itself can be taken to a dentist, and you shouldn't wait more than three months to do so. This device is convenient because it doesn't require use at a given time or in a given place. You only have to be asleep and using the Bite Strip for four and a half hours.

Once you use the Bite Strip, your dentist can determine how frequently you brux and what the severity of your sleep bruxism is. A regular dental checkup will probably clue your dentist in, especially if you've had any work done, such as

fillings or caps. Just like the teeth they've been made to stand in for, bruxism will damage these as well.

Your dentist is likely to discover your bruxism before you do. After the enamel becomes eroded, the softer part of the tooth, the dentine, will erode even faster. This leads to fractured or decaying teeth. Some experience recession of the gums as time goes on – usually in the advanced stages of bruxism damage.

The bright side is that, if you have eroded teeth, it may not necessarily indicate bruxism. It never hurts to get a second opinion. There are other causes that a dental practitioner can identify, including over brushing, the use of harsh toothpastes and trauma to the head.

### **Hair Analysis**

Your dentist may also want to perform a hair analysis. It may be that your body has an imbalance of potassium or salts. In many cases, these can contribute to bruxism. While this is certainly one of the more unusual causes, it nevertheless does occur and should be considered if other causes cannot be found.

While the medical community still has a lot of research to conduct on this topic, there are a few causes that have been established, and in many cases, are correctable.



## Chapter 2: What Causes Bruxism?

As we've discussed earlier, bruxism is caused by a variety of conditions. All of these are related to subconscious brain activity. Basically, your brain is telling the nerves in your jaw to contract your muscles and bite down, for no apparent reason.

Let's begin by more specifically exploring what causes bruxism:

- drug induced bruxism
- malocclusion (misaligned bite)
- lifestyle changes (leading to stress, anger and frustration)

### **Drug Induced Bruxism**

Some drugs have been known to cause bruxism, including the following:

- amphetamines and psycho stimulants
- antidepressants

### **Amphetamines and Psycho Stimulants**

Amphetamines will induce a change in normal sleep patterns. Most notable of these is alteration of REM (rapid eye movement) cycles in sleep. These cycles occur when you're dreaming, and they're an essential component of sleep. A REM cycle generally lasts for an average of 90 minutes before the brain reverts to a dormant sleep cycle.

Commonly known drugs in this family include Adderall, Ritalin and, on the extreme end, crystal meth. This family of drugs is also used to treat a wide range of disorders from alcoholism to ADHD.

Disruption of REM sleep (the deep sleep you are in when dreaming) causes the subconscious part of the brain to initiate brain activity. While it may result in bruxism for some, others can experience related sleep disorders such as sleepwalking. It is important to note here that bruxism and sleepwalking frequently occur in the same individual, leading experts to believe that one condition affects the appearance of the other.

### **Antidepressants**

The most commonly associated drugs linked to bruxism are SSRIs, or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. Most commonly prescribed as antidepressants, SSRIs limit how much serotonin can transfer from one neuron to the next. Serotonin is a neurochemical that regulates many different functions including mood, appetite and sensory perception.

While these drugs normally increase feelings of well-being in the clinically depressed and stabilize those with conditions such as manic depression, anxiety disorders and schizophrenia, they have other, unintentional effects. One of these is disruption or alteration of the sleep cycle.

SSRIs have been cited in at least 127 pharmacotherapy journals as inducing sleep disorders like bruxism and sleepwalking. The SSRI family of drugs includes those that prohibit psychotic episodes, including:

- Venlafaxine
- Prozac
- Effexor
- Wellbutrin
- Zoloft
- Paxil
- Celebrex

### **Bruxism Induced by Malocclusion**

Another cause of bruxism is malocclusion. In lay terms, this simply means that the teeth on the top part of your mouth, the maxilla, and the bottom part, the mandible, don't fit together in alignment.

By definition, it's nearly impossible not to have some degree of malocclusion. After all, it would be like expecting that one's arms, legs, ears feet or hands share exact dimensions and are carbon copies of one another. In other words, everyone's bite is misaligned to some degree.

In most occasions, malocclusion is no cause for alarm – though it may be a long-term concern. If the cause is skeletal in origin, (simply the way your jaw is formed) teeth grinding will result in the top and bottom part of your mouth being maligned. Your dentist will be able to tell not only whether you suffer from bruxism, but also whether this is the result of your bite being misaligned.

Malocclusion can be corrected by braces, or in extreme cases, orthognatic surgery. Orthognatic surgery is similar to orthodontic surgery. The difference is that orthognatic surgeons correct the structure of the jaw itself as opposed to working exclusively inside the mouth.

There are three types of malocclusion, graded based on the relation of the jaw and teeth to the first molars:

- Skeletal, (the way your jaw is naturally formed)
- Overcrowding

The bright side is that an orthodontist can correct this cause of bruxism.

## **Frustration, Lifestyle Stress and Anger**

Sometimes, life is tough. That's life. Perhaps there was a death in the family. Maybe something traumatic occurred, like a car accident. You may have been a victim of corporate downsizing. Even happy events can be stressful, such as a wedding or the birth of a child.

Even when the event is over in your own mind, your body may continue to react to the stress. It produces hormones and chemicals such as estrogen, testosterone or adrenaline as a response to the stress. This is simply a "fight or flight" reaction, a basic function of most animal species that prepares you for imminent danger.

Some ignore or attempt to suppress this natural response. That might seem like the right thing to do, but ultimately this leads to sleep disorders such as bruxism. Suppressing stress can take many forms, including overeating, substance abuse, criminal activity or avoidance. While identifying the cause of psychosomatic bruxism can be difficult, it is possible, as we'll discuss in a later chapter.

For now, it is important to recognize bruxism as two distinct types of disorders:

- a dental condition
- a sleep disorder

The next chapter will discuss the best way to sleep, what the body does during sleep and how this relates to teeth grinding.

## Chapter 3: The Best Way to Sleep

As discussed in the previous chapter, sleep occurs in both REM (rapid eye movement) and non rapid eye movement cycles (NREM). Sleep has a physiological purpose in restoring your immune system and guaranteeing that you have optimal memory and cognitive function.

Various chemicals in the brain, such as melatonin, have properties that restore cell mitochondria and DNA. DNA is the basic blueprint of your cells that tells them how to behave, interact and reproduce. Mitochondria act as a miniature power plant for your cells, absorbing the nutrients sent to the cellular level energy production at a microscopic level.

The average adult requires eight hours of good, uninterrupted sleep. Bruxism, sleepwalking and many related disorders are a byproduct of some kind of sleep disruption. In clearly identified causes, these are related to extraneous brain activity. The bottom line is that to get a good night's sleep, you must be able to fall asleep and stay asleep with no disruptions.

Work can be a primary contributing factor to sleep disruption. Anxiety, working too much overtime, family issues, social issues, and simply worrying about all of it has killed many a good night's sleep.

Add in a daily, grinding commute, the need to cook dinner, clean your house, grocery shop do the laundry, and pay attention to the kids, and you'll probably soon find that something has to give.

When you miss out on restorative sleep, your body misses out on the REM cycles it needs, and as a consequence, you experience bruxism or a related disorder.

The good news is that most people who sleep for an adequate amount of time and in regular intervals can get into that REM state with a fair amount of ease.

Your diet is also important to sleep. Simply put, you are what you eat. Without helpful nutrients like vitamin B and omega 3 or 6 acids, the brain won't function properly. It is also a fact that your brain uses most of the energy provided by the food you eat. Bruxism, however, may be a nutritional issue. We'll discuss this in a later chapter.

Drugs can also play a part in helping or hurting your chances of getting a good night's sleep. For example, when coffee is consumed even four hours before you say goodnight, it can actually keep you from sleeping. Likewise, alcohol can disrupt the later half of REM cycles. This occurs due to alcohol's basic biochemical interaction, which deprives brain cells of oxygen. Most alcohol concentrates in the lower part of the brain, which governs REM sleep and subconscious activity.

If you can, get outside and soak up some sunlight immediately upon waking up. It's important to remember that light plays an important role both when you go to sleep and when you awake. You should always get up at the same time. Likewise, you should also get to bed at the same time.

When you do go to bed, turn out all the lights. Why? Because the pineal gland produces melatonin, which causes you to grow tired and fall asleep. Melatonin production is inhibited by light, and conversely, is created during the absence of light. This gland is located in the brain, and releases this chemical in order to regulate your sleeping pattern. Leave lights on and your Melatonin levels will not rise to assist you in falling asleep.

Another step you can take is to make sure your bed and your pillow are comfortable. If not, that's an obvious reason for disruption and bruxism. A mattress, while it may seem like an expensive household purchase, is one of the most important investments you can make. Back and neck support is vital for a good night's sleep. And disturbances in your sleeping environment can set you up to develop unhealthy habits like bruxism.

Make sure the temperature of your bedroom is between 60 and 74 degrees, the best temperature of sleeping, so it is not too cold and not too hot.

The bedroom itself can both create and inhibit the mindset necessary for a good night's sleep. Make sure your bedroom has a minimal amount of clutter in it. Also, use your bedroom for sleeping – and only sleeping. Don't use your bedroom for watching TV, exercise or any activity associated with being awake. By the same token, it should be used for relaxation and meditation, which will be covered in the next chapter.

You should also make sure there's a minimum amount of noise, light and pollution. Also, consider turning your alarm clock away so you can't look at it – the more you see it, the less sleep you'll get.

Certain medical conditions such as arthritis, asthma and allergies also increase the chances you'll suffer from bruxism. These conditions put stress on the body, inhibit REM cycles and guarantee that the quality of your sleep will be poor.

### **How you should be laying in your bed**

When you go to bed you should try your best to fall asleep on your back. If you have slept on your side or your stomach your whole life this can be a lot harder then it sounds. You should elevate your head and neck on a small soft pillow and have your head tilted back on your pillow just slightly. This makes it more difficult for your bottom jaw to clench as hard as it usually does. To test this out

lay down in the position mentioned and lightly close your jaw, you will find you need to put in more effort to close your jaw than if you were lying on your side.

You may find it uncomfortable to sleep like this at first and you may even give up a couple of times. Eventually you will get use to it and you will find yourself waking up in the same position.

The next chapter of this book will discuss relaxation techniques. In terms of teeth grinding, they can make a world of difference, especially when utilized right before a good night's sleep.

## Chapter 4: Simple Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation is vital to a good night's sleep. There are also a number of important health benefits to be obtained through relaxation exercises. They will not only minimize nighttime teeth grinding, but will benefit your mental sharpness and all-around health during the waking hours of your day.

### **Breathing Exercises**

Breathing exercises have been known to help a variety of medical conditions ranging from asthma to mental health issues. As you'll discover, breathing is an important foundation for meditation itself, which we'll also be discussing and learning more about.

### **Ventilation & Breathing**

Ventilation is important. Make sure you get the cleanest, freshest air possible. Dehumidifiers and air purification should be used when appropriate. The idea is to not only breathe regularly, but comfortably.

Proper breathing should be done using the abdomen and diaphragm – not the chest. If you paid no attention to your breathing, this is how you would breathe without even trying. It's important to remember how to breathe naturally to ensure a good supply of oxygen to the blood.

Disturbed or unnatural breathing can contribute to a variety of sleep disorders, including bruxism. Many also find that it complicates depression and other illnesses that don't appear to be directly related. But they are.

Why? Your brain requires oxygen to function and operate the rest of your body. During the night, this is more difficult. Lying down puts more stress on your lungs, and makes it harder to breathe. This is why most asthmatics have their attacks at night. Studies have established that, at least during REM sleep, air resistance in the trachea increases by 230%.

### **More About Breathing Exercises**

The first thing you should do is observe your normal breathing pattern. Just breathe comfortably and observe. Find a place to do this beyond any source of distraction. That means locking the door, taking the phone off the hook and telling company not to come calling.

Once you become aware of your breathing pattern, breathe in over the course of three seconds. Exhale over the course of two seconds. Repeat this until it becomes natural. This should be done over a course of ten minutes, but no

longer than 15. After 15 minutes, you run the risk of having your body fight the process, thus turning your mind off to it. You can always extend the time of this exercise once your body grows accustomed to it.

The important thing to bear in mind is that everyone has a natural frequency of breathing. Healthy breathing is done on a regular frequency. You may find that instead of breathing in for three seconds and exhaling for two, it may become inhaling for two and exhaling for three. Your goal is simply to find what works, and discipline your body to make whatever happy medium you arrive at consistently.

What you are seeking to correct is any irregularity in your breathing. While this may or may not be the cause of your bruxism, the correction will assist the rest of your body in resolving the issue.

Further breathing exercise can be obtained and developed by taking up yoga. While, again, this may or may not be related to your bruxism or its cure, the health and wellness benefits can contribute.

## **Meditation**

For the purposes of this book, we're going to define meditation as a deep state of relaxation where your brain resets itself. If you have never meditated before you will find it much easier if you are listening to binaural beats. If you don't have binaural beats you can purchase them from [here](#) and download them instantly. You must listen to these sounds with headphones.

On your first attempt, you'll want to eliminate any potential distractions as you've done with the breathing exercises. You may also want to try it the first time sitting up. Find a comfortable chair where you can sit upright while resting your arms. While you shouldn't move, there's no need to remain stiff or uncomfortable.

Begin with the breathing exercise. Focus only on your breathing. After breathing in and completely exhaling about ten times, close your eyes. Throughout this process, focus only on your breathing. You should spend no longer than 10 minutes when you first attempt this, as your body will become resistant. You may find that your thoughts begin to wander, and you begin moving around.

Some prefer to set an alarm to go off at the end of their meditating session, which should be done while you grow accustomed to it. Eventually, you'll be moving your location to the bed, because you'll soon learn how to begin a good night's rest in a deeply relaxed state with regular breathing.

This type of meditation is best right before you go to sleep. It will eliminate any thoughts running through your head and completely relax your body.



## **Acquiring a Meditative Focus**

Once you get used to the exercises, you may wish to move a little further into advanced meditation. While you should still relax in the same way before you go to sleep, this exercise is a perfect way to reset during the day. With time, it will help keep your breathing regular throughout the day – and more so at night.

Acquiring a meditative focus is simply meditating, but doing so with your eyes open, and fixed on a single point. If you're sitting in an armchair, this can be a matter of looking at a picture or object. If you're conducting this exercise in bed, you could always find a focal point like a ceiling tile. You could also pin a thumbtack in your ceiling, which serves the same purpose.

Begin as if you were doing the breathing exercise. After inhaling and exhaling for a moment, you can start moving into meditation, but with your eyes open. Keep your thoughts clear, and your eyes on the focal point.

After about eight minutes, you'll be in a more relaxed state than the previous meditation exercise covered – provided you've maintained your focus and breathing pattern. With practice, a state of deep relaxation arrives much sooner.

What you will notice is that this deep state of relaxation is accompanied by what appears to be a shift in your depth perception. This is followed by what looks like the light in the room becoming dimmer, then lighter, and cycling between both. This is only the firing of neurons – not you losing your mind. Just take this as an indicator that you've arrived at a deep state of relaxation.

You should also note that there are a large number of meditation groups and instructors to choose from. While the exercises outlined above are very basic, there are many forms you can experiment with. And with practice, you can expect a better night's sleep. While the causes of bruxism can be numerous, this will certainly help.

The next chapter will discuss the consequences of nighttime bruxism on your oral health. While there is a lot you can do to limit these causes, you should be aware of them for your own good health.

## Chapter 5: Oral Health in Relation to Teeth Grinding

Normal, healthy teeth serve as an important part of the digestive tract. They break down food into smaller parts, priming it for the stomach to digest them into the primary nutrients your body uses. Needless to say, poorly masticated (chewed) food equates to poorly digested food and gastrointestinal problems down the road.

Below is a picture of healthy teeth, in figure 1, and advanced damage from bruxism, in figure 2 –



Figure 1



Figure 2

This is a diagram of the tooth –

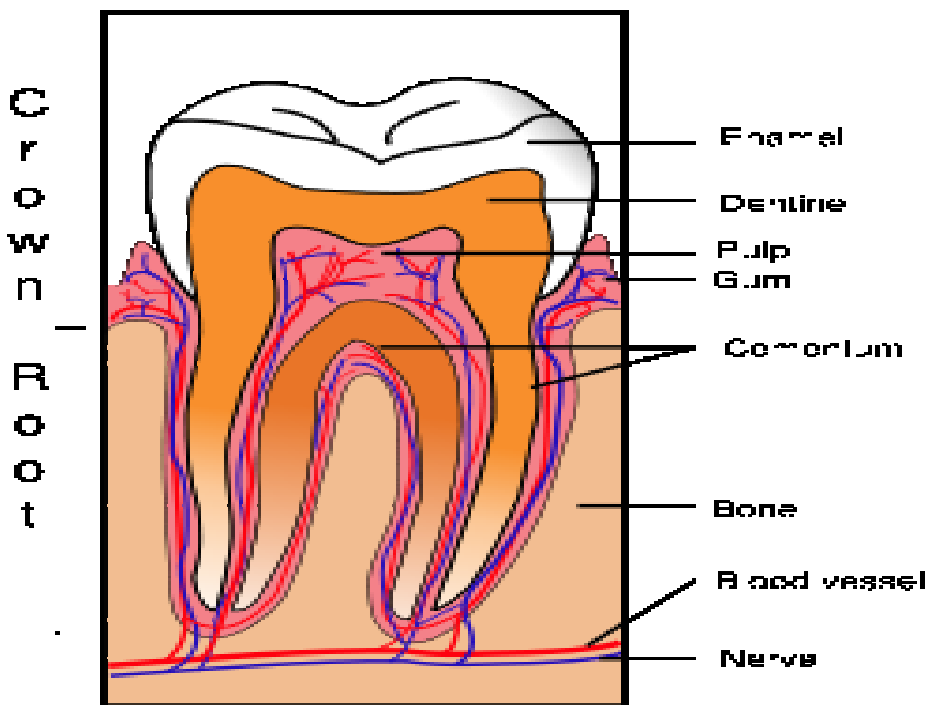


Figure 3

Note the difference between figure 1 and 2. If you refer to figure 3, you'll notice that the teeth in figure 2 have lost most of their enamel. Figure 2 demonstrates the advanced stages of untreated bruxism, most notably, a severe loss of enamel

and exposed dentine, the softer part of the tooth on the inside. The teeth in figure 2 have lost a great deal of functionality, and require considerable reconstruction. Let's have a closer look at exposed dentine, in figure 4.



Figure 4

The dentine is the interior part of the tooth. Dentine is comprised of calcium, water and hydroxylapatite, a bonding of calcium, hydrogen, oxygen and phosphorus. Whereas the enamel protecting it is hard, the dentine is soft and malleable. Consequently, it grinds quickly when bruxism is left untreated. It takes much less time to break through this layer of the tooth, and subsequently, much less after grinding reaches the pulp layer in figure 3.

### **How Bruxism Damages Teeth**

Bruxism can have several consequences before or after dentine has become exposed. These include –

- Chips in Teeth
- Worn Surfaces
- Abfractions
- Flattened Edges
- Loose Teeth
- Chewed Tissue Within Mouth
- TMJ Disorder, or Lockjaw
- Decay, or Fracture of Teeth with Decay
- Ruined Dental Work like Fillings, Caps, etc.

It is essential that bruxism be identified and treated before significant damage occurs.

## **Bruxism and Gum Damage**

Teeth grinding at night can also cause significant gum damage. This may include, but is not limited to, lesions and receding gums. Damage may also extend in the form of abscesses, periodontal pockets and infections.

Now that we've covered what bruxism is, and what it can do, it's time to explore some options. In the next chapter, we'll discuss specific things you can do about grinding your teeth in the night, how to minimize damage, and some ways to prevent this.

## **Chapter 6: Preventing Bruxism - Relax Your Muscles**

When you sleep with muscles that are not relaxed, they will want to tense up. In some parts of your body this will cause cramps but the muscles in your face will cause you to clench and grind your teeth.

There are some pharmaceutical options available like Robaxacet and Tylenol that will help your muscles to relax while you sleep. But what if you don't want to take these types of drugs that may have harsh side effects?

Below are some methods you can do yourself that will help your muscles relax while you sleep.

### **The Warm Compress**

This method is used to relax all of your muscles and not just your facial muscles. A warm compress will loosen up muscle tissue and improve circulation, even extreme athletes use this method to help their muscles relax.

For nocturnal Bruxism you should use a warm compress just before you go to sleep. Get a wash cloth and wet it with hot water. Wring out the excess water and hold the cloth to your facial muscles. Target all of the muscles that usually hurt when you wake up in the morning as these are the ones you use as you are grinding and clenching your teeth.

If you follow your cheek bone along and stop where your cheek bone and jaw meet, this is where you should hold the warm cloth against. Hold it firmly against those muscles for 10 minutes or until the cloth is no longer warm.

## **Natural Herbs**

After lots of trial and error I have found a few herbs that will drastically reduce nocturnal bruxism. You can take these herbs orally or massage them into your skin, concentrating on the jaw and neck.

### 1 – St. John’s Wort (Hypericum Perforatum)

Oral: This is something you will need to take during the day, not just before bedtime. First, visit your health care store and purchase some St. John’s wort capsules. With water, you should take a 250mg capsule 3 times a day.

Massage: Take a teaspoon of olive oil or almond oil and combine this with 4 drops of St. John’s Wort essential oil. Massage this into your facial muscles and neck.

### 2 – Cramp Bark and Lobelia

Massage: Combine olive oil or almond oil with 4 drops of either Cramp Bark oil or Lobelia oil. Massage this into your facial muscles and neck.

### 3 – Valerian

Drink: Add 10 drops of Valerian extract to warm water before bed time or have a drink of warm Valerian tea.

Massage: Combine olive oil or almond oil with 4 drops of Valerian essential oil. Massage this into your facial muscles and neck.

## Chapter 7: Helping Bruxism During the Day

This chapter will cover solutions to nocturnal bruxism you can pursue during the day.

### **If Prescription Drugs are the Cause**

If prescription drugs are the cause of your teeth grinding, you should immediately consult your doctor and pharmacist to look for an alternative. It is necessary to discontinue these drugs if at all possible.

It is likely that your doctor will suggest discontinuing such drugs or switching them slowly. This is especially true for drugs that alter sleep cycles, such as SSRIs or amphetamines. (See Chapter 2 under the subheading ‘Antidepressants’ for more information on SSRIs). An abrupt change in dosage, may cause a severe disturbance in your sleeping pattern. SSRIs take about a

month to build a concentration in your bloodstream, which allows plenty of time for your sleeping patterns to change in a very permanent way. Abrupt change in dosage doesn't provide your body the time required to adjust.

However, if prescription drugs are the cause of your nighttime teeth grinding, other drugs are available to help you. As before, a doctor will know which ones have the highest efficacies, or usefulness, for you. These include, but are not limited to:

- ⇒ Buspirone
- ⇒ Propranolol
- ⇒ Gabapentin

While these are tested for the treatment of other disorders, limited dosage may serve to at least limit bruxism.

Oddly enough, botox injections, usually reserved for cosmetic facial procedures, is showing promise in treating some of the causes of bruxism. Injecting Botox into the jaw muscle often works because it paralyzes the muscle's nerve endings. You should discuss this option at length with your dentist and general practitioner, as Botox has its own risks that may or may not outweigh the benefits of use.

## **Relaxation and Meditation**

Refer to chapter 4, Simple Relaxation Techniques, for a more in-depth discussion of this subject. As previously discussed, these exercises reduce stress, a contributing cause of bruxism, and ensure you get a good night's sleep.

## **Caffeine, Alcohol and Nicotine Consumption**

These drugs should be avoided in excess during the day. Alcohol can impair the quality of your sleep when used in excess, and should not be consumed prior to three hours before bed. You should avoid coffee six hours before you sleep, and likewise, nicotine two hours before you sleep. Chapter four explains the effects of these chemicals on sleep in greater detail.

## **Regular Dental and Medical Checkups**

Regular dental checkups identify bruxism before conditions worsen, and allow your dentist to guide treatment. If you wear a mouth guard or repositioning splints, you should bring these to your checkup.

Your general practitioner can work with you on other causes of teeth grinding, and help identify ones your dentist cannot by process of elimination. A doctor and pharmacist can also guide your decisions regarding prescription medication.

## **Stress Management Therapy**

As stress is a primary cause of nocturnal bruxism, it may be best to check in with a counselor or therapist. While they may or may not recommend drugs to assist stress management or therapy, you may want to discuss potential side effects that could worsen the problem.

A therapist may also be helpful in walking you through your problems. At the very least, it may help you feel better to have someone with an open ear listening to you. Eventually, this may help you find your own way to cope with stress or find a way out of complicated issues.

Relaxation, as discussed in Chapter Four, can also be of assistance when it comes to stress management. If your stress is the result of any issues you have with family or friends, talk to them and work these out. While difficult, this should be done immediately if it turns out to be the root or predominate cause of bruxism.

## **Talk to Your Significant Other**

If you have a significant other, talk to them. Ask them to wake you up if they hear you grinding your teeth at night. While it probably won't stop you from doing it, there's at least a chance of limiting the damage.

## **Repairing Damage to Teeth from Bruxism**

Your dentist may be able to repair or restore some damage from bruxism. This largely depends on how long your condition has gone unnoticed.

Options include a wide variety of dental crowns and anchors. Materials for use on these prosthetics range from acrylic and porcelain to gold.

Your dentist can also provide an occlusal guard, which works similar to a mouth guard and prevents damage to your teeth when you sleep. **This will prevent damage to new work from bruxism while you work with professionals to address its causes.**

## **Herbal Remedies and Nutritional Supplements**

A wide variety of herbal alternatives and treatments exist to treat bruxism, some more effective than others, and a few are ineffective. This simply reflects that bruxism needs to be dealt with on an individual basis. For example, if your bruxism is only caused by medication, jaw exercises or treatment for malocclusion probably won't help.

One product on the market is called Disbruxis, a mixture of Gastrodia tuber, Schisandra Fruit, polygala root, fo-ti root, gypsum, oyster shell, anemarrhena root and moutan root bark.

St. John's Wort has also been known as a natural antidepressant. However, St. John's Wort also interacts with some medications and reduces the effect of others. You should consult a doctor if you happen to be on medication and considering this treatment.

It may help if you take specific nutrients like magnesium or vitamin B. Like Bruxism, there are a lot of disorders today that are strictly the result of the foods we eat and the lack of nutrients in some typical American foods.

For example, bread today has a third of the fiber it contained in 1900. Try the following amount of these vitamins and nutrients –

- Calcium, 600 mg
- Magnesium, 500 mg
- Vitamin B complex

Extra supplements:

- Vitamin C, with bioflavonoids, 1,000 mg
- Vitamin B5, 25 mg twice daily

**Hypoglycemia**, a condition in which the blood sugar drops to an abnormally low level, also creates a predisposition toward bruxism. Aside from making sure your blood sugar stays at a healthy level, the following supplements may be helpful to you –

- Stinging Nettle Leaves
- Horsetail
- Watercress
- Kelp
- Hops
- Passion Flower
- Lemon Balm
- Peppermint
- Chamomile

Many of these remedies can be prepared as either teas or tonics. You might also consider adopting the diet of a hypoglycemic, which provides all the necessary nutrients while limiting dietary causes of bruxism.

## **Muscle Relaxants**



Some cases of bruxism are severe enough to warrant the use of muscle relaxants such as benzodiazepines. Unfortunately, this type of treatment may not be effective until the cause of bruxism is determined and dealt with.

## **Chapter 8: Jaw Muscle Exercises**

The Temporomandibular Joint is the main joint of your jaw. Its purpose is to help your jaw open and close properly. Unnatural stresses to this joint can cause pain. Exercises for your jaw joint can help reduce bruxism. While they may not work in every case, these should at least be tried. Since bruxism is caused by contracting muscles, stretching these can produce some degree of relief.

### **Press and Stretch Exercise**

You should perform this exercise just before you go to bed and before you do any meditation. It is called the press and stretch because that's exactly what you do.

The first step is to place your thumbs under your cheekbone just where your cheekbone and skull connect. To test if you have the correct position put your thumbs in place and gently clench your teeth, you should feel the muscles tense up.

Once you know where to press, press down firmly and clench your teeth at the same time. You should put something between your teeth so that you are not doing further damage to your teeth. Press and clench at the same time for about 4 seconds then release. Do this about 5 times.

After each 5 press and clenches you should gently stretch your jaw. Repeat this process 5 times.

NOTE: Do not try to stretch your jaw while you are still pressing down.

### **The Stretch and Stretch Some More Exercise**

This exercise is to be used if you have a sore jaw from clenching, it is not designed to stop bruxism but to relieve the pain. You should do this exercise in the mornings to midday.

To conduct the exercise, slowly, very slowly, open your mouth. Open as widely as you can. Continue until it becomes impossible to go any further, then hold your mouth open for 10 seconds. Then, slowly close. Repeat four more times. This should not be continued if it results in pain..

Then continue the exercise but this time use your hand to apply more pressure. As before, go slowly, then close slowly. This exercise should not be continued if it results in significant pain. You should also hold your mouth open for 10 seconds, and complete a total of five repetitions.

### **Hard to Open Exercise**

This exercise involves strengthening the opposite muscles that are used for grinding. This will even up the strength in your jaw muscles.

To perform this exercise hold under your chin with your hand and push your chin up. Now you have to slowly open your mouth and try to force your hand down. You should feel it working your upper jaw muscles. Try to avoid clicking in your jaw.

Do this exercise for about 4 minutes and can be repeated a few times during the day.

## **Chapter 9: The Nose obstruction method**

This is a fail proof method. You should use this as a back up plan if the above methods don't help you stop grinding. The idea is to block you nose before you go to sleep which will force you to breath using your mouth. This will keep your mouth open slightly during the night and will stop teeth grinding. You should block your nose enough so that you can still breath through your nose but it must be difficult.

To do this you can use "strapping tape" and put 2 small holes in it where your

nostrils will be. This will obstruct breathing though your nose enough so that you will use your mouth to breath when you are asleep. You can also use any type of thin cloth and cover your nose completely.

The idea with behind this method is to break the habit, kind of like when a smoker wants to quit and goes “cold turkey”. After a few nights of this IN A ROW, you will notice massive improvements.

### **The upsides to this method**

- Very high success rate
- Cheap and you can do it yourself at home
- After a few weeks you will not grind or clench your teeth anymore

### **The downsides to this method**

- Getting to sleep with your nose block can be quite difficult. You may give up on your first time because it just feels so un-natural, but give it a few attempts and you will get use to it.
- If you use tape to cover your nostrils your skin may get irritated.
- You will also notice that you will have a very dry mouth when you wake up, so be sure to keep a bottle of water next to your bed.

### **When NOT to use this method**

Do not use the nose obstruction method if:

- You have a cold/flu
- You have any troubles breathing through your mouth
- You have consumed alcohole

**Please see professional medical advise before using this method**

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this book, we’ve discussed bruxism at great length, including potential causes, therapies that are available to treat bruxism or limit its damage, and what you can personally do to help yourself.

Let’s recap with a few important highlights –

1. If you've experienced all of the symptoms listed at the beginning of chapter one, see a dentist.
2. Consider purchasing a bite strip. Conduct the test, and bring it to the dentist's office with you. Bruxism is easier to deal with the earlier you catch it. And don't wait. There's no reason to ruin your smile.
3. Remember the three primary causes of bruxism – stress, prescription drugs and malocclusion. Determining the cause mean determining the solution.
4. There are things you can do to limit the damage. You and your dentist have a variety of options including mouth guards.
5. You may not necessarily need to wear a mouth guard all your life. As we've discussed, there are a variety of approaches you can take once you, your dentist and your doctor have determined the cause.

We hope this book was helpful to you. Remember, you can always go back and review the information if you have questions. And we encourage you to consult your dental professional about the treatment that is right for you.

Remember to take a look at the fast track plans if you haven't already. You can find this in the members area.

***This information is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Do not use this information for diagnosing or treating a suspected health condition. If you have or suspect you have a health care issue, promptly contact your professional healthcare provider.***