



# Daily Grind

*If it feels like the daily grind of life is wearing you down,*

make sure it's not wearing down your teeth. Grinding or clenching your teeth, also called bruxism, can prematurely shorten teeth and lead to all kinds of health problems. Many people grind or clench their teeth when anxious or tense. Traffic jams, school exams and job deadlines can trigger anxious emotions which may lead to grinding.

Some people save up their stress for nighttime and grind in their sleep. Nighttime bruxing is the most damaging to teeth and can be very difficult to stop. Custom made or over the counter guards can help deflect grinding onto another surface but they don't stop the actual grinding itself. Some sedative drugs can help stop nighttime grinding but have unwanted side effects for long term use. Acupuncture, bio-feedback and relaxation techniques may help some people to relax more and clench less but overall have mixed results.

This continual trauma puts enormous stress on teeth, supporting structures, and muscles of the face, neck and back, often leading to headaches, jaw joint inflammation, ear aches, gum problems, tooth sensitivity to hot and cold, rapid tooth wear and even loose teeth. Shortened teeth from abrasive wear makes a person look old and tired before their time. Adding to the problem is that many people are completely unaware they are doing it.

Prevention includes eating healthy, good sleep habits, exercise, massage for stress relief and muscle tension, and being conscious of facial tension and if teeth are together or apart when driving or doing other tasks. Relaxation and self hypnosis techniques may also help.

Ask your dental professional if they see signs of too much wear and tear on your tooth enamel. Are there shiny, flat spots? Are the back teeth bumpy or flattened? Can you see the inside of the tooth? Waking with headaches, jaw pain or chronic face pain may also be indicators of clenching or grinding. Your dentist or hygienist can often suggest some additional treatment ideas to help you stop grinding or clenching.

You can't easily replace tooth structure once you've lost it, so prevention is the key.

<http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/guide/teeth-grinding-bruxism>

<http://www.ada.org/public/topics/grinding.asp>

<http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/library/DS/00337.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/13/health/13grin.html>

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