

NOCTURNAL BRUXISM

It is estimated that between 30 and 40 million U.S. children and adults grind their teeth at night. Not only does the grinding sound associated with “nocturnal bruxism” awaken and alarm sleepers in the same room as the tooth-grinder, but it can also cause wear and tear on the teeth and damage bone and gums. This rhythmic activity of the jawbone forcing contact between dental surfaces has also been linked to headaches, joint discomfort, muscle aches, and premature tooth loss. Many people are unaware they have a problem with tooth grinding until a sleep partner points out the fact. This should prompt a visit to the dentist, who can prescribe a mouth guard to protect the grinder’s teeth.

P.S. Aside from being a symptom of stress and anxiety, bruxism can be the result of the body’s reaction when the teeth do not line up or come together properly (malocclusion).

TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO BRUSH

The best way to instill the habit of brushing teeth in children is to have them learn by example. Once children have watched their parents perform this twice-daily ritual and get the hang of it, parents should encourage their kids to brush their own teeth. First, children should learn to dab only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on their soft-bristled toothbrushes. They should then concentrate on gently brushing back and forth on the inside surface of each tooth, where bacteria-laden plaque is most likely to accumulate. After that, the outer surfaces should be brushed with the brush turned at an angle along the gumline. Before rinsing, children should try some tongue-brushing to introduce an element of fun into the process.

P.S. Parents should floss for their children beginning at age four. By the time they reach age eight, most kids can begin flossing for themselves.

BRIGHT IDEA

If you have stained or discolored teeth, you might want to try a fast and effective professional tooth-whitening procedure that can make your teeth up to eight shades lighter. This technique makes use of advanced LED light-activated technology to enhance the action of bleaching materials on teeth. One of the advantages of this new tooth-whitening technique is the speed at which it can be accomplished. (Treatments typically take an hour.) This is made possible by the fact that light activates the tooth-whitening agent to work more quickly. Severe discoloration, such as that associated with tetracycline stains, may require more than one treatment. Yellow and brown teeth respond better to treatment than gray teeth, which lighten but do not whiten.

P.S. Veneers, caps, crowns, and false teeth cannot be whitened.

LOOSELY SPEAKING

When patients are fitted with artificial replacements for all their teeth (“dentures”) or just some of their teeth (“partials”), they should look for signs of loosening or irritation. The fact is that areas of the jaw without teeth tend to shrink over time. As a result of this loss of bone, dentures and partials made to fit the area may become loose. This problem may be addressed by relining them with new material; however, sometimes the dentures and partials may need to be replaced. In any case, ignoring loose-fitting dentures and partials can shift pressure to other areas, thereby causing gum irritation and accelerated bone loss. Changes in the fit of dentures and partials should not be ignored.

P.S. If dentures and partials require increasingly more denture adhesive to stay in place, it is likely a sign that they need to be adjusted.