



CARE INSTRUCTIONS

KAISER PERMANENTE

Teeth Grinding

Your Kaiser Permanente Care Instructions

You may not be aware that you are grinding or clenching your teeth (bruxism). For many people, this happens during sleep. Even though you may be able to sleep through it, you may be grinding away parts of your teeth. If you continue to wear away your teeth, you may break or loosen a tooth or filling or wear down your biting edges.

Causes of teeth grinding include stress, an abnormal bite, or crooked or missing teeth. In some cases, teeth grinding is made worse by alcohol or drug abuse. Teeth grinding and clenching can cause pain and popping in your jaw joint. Other symptoms are earaches, headaches, and face pain.

Talk to your dentist about your teeth. He or she can determine what treatment is right for you. In some cases, a mouthguard or mouth splint can help protect the teeth from more damage. If stress is a cause of your grinding or clenching, your doctor or other health care professional may prescribe medicine to help you relax.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Ask your dentist to teach you how to position your tongue, teeth, and jaw to prevent grinding or clenching. Then practice this position, especially before going to sleep.
- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor or other health care professional if you think you are having a problem with your medicine. We need to speak with you to decide together the next steps in finding the best solution for you. You will get more details on the specific medicines your doctor or other health care professional prescribes.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Put ice or a cold pack on sore jaw muscles. Warm, moist cloths also will work to relax the muscles and reduce pain. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.

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- Get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week to help relieve stress. Walking is a good choice. You also may want to do other activities, such as running, swimming, cycling, or playing tennis or team sports.
- If you have a sleeping partner, ask him or her to let you know when you are grinding or clenching your teeth. You may be able to change positions and relax your jaw, and you both can go back to sleep.
- Practice breathing and relaxation exercises to reduce tension.
- Treat yourself to a massage. Some people find regular massages very helpful to relax muscles. You also can give yourself a neck, shoulder, and face massage.
- During the day, try to keep your jaw, face, shoulder, and neck muscles relaxed.
- Avoid hard or chewy foods (such as popcorn, jerky, tough meats, chewy breads, gum, and raw apples and carrots) that cause your jaws to work very hard. Choose softer foods that are easy to chew, such as eggs, yogurt, and soup.
- Cut your food into small, bite-sized pieces, and chew slowly.
- Do not chew gum for long periods of time.
- If your dentist prescribes a mouthguard or splint, wear it as directed.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. As a partner in your health care, you can do things like keep all scheduled visits, be sure you know the results of all tests and labs ordered as part of your care, and keep an up-to-date personal list of the medicines you are taking. Know how to contact us between visits, and call your doctor or other health care professional if you have signs that you are having problems.

When should you call your doctor or other health care professional?

- You have trouble chewing or opening and closing your jaw.
- You have headaches, earaches, or face pain.
- You have trouble sleeping because you cannot stop moving your jaw or your jaw hurts.
- You do not get better as expected.
- You have any problems with your medicine.

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How can you learn more about teeth grinding?

- Log on: members.kp.org. Search for **temporomandibular disorders** in the **Health encyclopedia**.

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