Nightguards for Bruxism: Protecting Teeth From Grinding

By Dr. George Salem

You may not notice yourself clenching your teeth during the day or grinding them at night. Often, the first clue is something your dentist sees: flattened edges, a small chip, or unusual wear. These changes can develop gradually, even when your teeth do not hurt.

At Dr. George Salem and Associates, PC, we help patients in Braintree understand how bruxism can damage teeth and when a custom nightguard may help. Protecting your smile starts with understanding the habit.



What Is Bruxism?

Bruxism is grinding or clenching the teeth. It can happen during sleep or while you are awake, sometimes without your noticing.

Someone may grind at night without remembering it, while another person presses their teeth together while concentrating. Some people experience both. Occasional clenching is not necessarily harmful, but repeated or forceful activity may affect teeth and dental restorations.

How Are Bruxism, TMJ, and TMD Different?

These terms are often confused, but they describe different things. Understanding the distinction helps explain why protecting teeth and evaluating jaw pain require different conversations.

The temporomandibular joints, or TMJs, connect the lower jaw to the skull in front of each ear. Everyone has these joints. Temporomandibular disorders, called TMD, involve certain problems affecting the joints or surrounding muscles. Bruxism describes grinding or clenching behavior.

Grinding may occur alongside muscle soreness, but it does not automatically mean you have TMD. Persistent jaw pain, locking, or difficulty opening your mouth deserves an appropriate evaluation separate from preventing dental wear.

Signs That Grinding May Be Affecting Your Teeth

Bruxism can affect patients differently. During an examination, we look for signs that repeated grinding forces may be changing your teeth.

- Flattened, shortened, or uneven tooth edges
- Chips, cracks, or damage to fillings and crowns
- Tooth sensitivity associated with worn enamel
- Grinding sounds noticed by a sleeping partner
- Tiredness or soreness in the jaw muscles

These findings are clues rather than proof of one cause. Acid erosion and other conditions can also produce wear, so we consider your history and the pattern of damage.

What Can Cause Teeth Grinding?

Stress may contribute to bruxism, but it is not the only possible factor. Not everyone who experiences stress grinds their teeth, and grinding can happen even without an obvious trigger.

Sleep patterns, certain medications, tobacco, and alcohol or caffeine use may also be relevant. Sometimes the cause is unclear. For awake clenching, noticing when your teeth touch may help you change the habit, while sleep grinding may continue without your awareness.

How Nightguards for Bruxism Help Protect Teeth

A custom nightguard fits over the teeth to create a barrier between the upper and lower arches. Dr. George Salem and Associates, PC offers nightguards as part of our preventive dentistry care.

A guard may limit direct tooth-to-tooth contact and protect against further grinding-related damage. Its design and fit should reflect your teeth, bite, and dental history.

A Nightguard Does Not Necessarily Stop Grinding

A guard is designed to protect your teeth, not necessarily to eliminate the grinding habit. You may still move your jaw or clench against the appliance while wearing it.

A nightguard should not be viewed as a guaranteed solution for muscle pain or jaw-joint disorders. If wearing one causes discomfort or new pain, contact the dentist who fitted it.

The Fit Needs to Be Checked

We examine your teeth before determining whether a custom nightguard is appropriate. A well-fitting appliance also needs ongoing attention because teeth, restorations, and the guard itself can change over time.

Bring your nightguard to checkups if you notice damage, wear, or a change in fit. We can review whether it is still protecting your teeth as intended.

What Can You Do About Daytime Clenching?

Sleep grinding may be difficult to notice, but daytime clenching sometimes responds to greater awareness. If you regularly catch yourself pressing your teeth together at work or while driving, consider these practical steps.

- Notice when your teeth touch even though you are not chewing
- Use reminders to relax your jaw and separate your teeth
- Try relaxation activities or regular movement when stress is a factor
- Discuss possible medication-related grinding with your prescriber

These steps are not a guaranteed cure. They may help you recognize patterns and decide which concerns to discuss with your dentist or another healthcare professional.

When Worn Teeth Need Restorative Care

A nightguard cannot replace lost enamel or repair a cracked tooth. If grinding has already caused damage, we evaluate how much healthy tooth structure remains and how the teeth function together.

Depending on the findings, cosmetic bonding, crowns, or another restorative option may be appropriate. Extensive wear can call for a broader plan. Our article about restoring worn-down teeth explains how we assess those decisions.

Repairing existing wear and limiting further damage are separate goals. Not every flattened tooth requires a large restoration.

Frequently Asked Questions About Bruxism and Nightguards

Many patients are surprised to learn that they may grind their teeth. These answers clarify what a nightguard can and cannot do.

Will a Nightguard Stop Me From Grinding?

Not necessarily. Its main purpose is to separate the teeth and help reduce grinding-related damage. Some people notice changes in symptoms, but wearing a guard does not guarantee the habit will stop. We can evaluate your teeth, explain whether an appliance is appropriate, and discuss other concerns that may need attention.

Can I Have Bruxism Without Jaw Pain?

Yes. Some people grind or clench without noticeable pain, particularly when it happens during sleep. Flattened teeth, chips, or wear on restorations may be the first signs. Others experience muscle soreness or headaches. Because symptoms vary, a dental examination can help identify tooth damage even when you feel fine.

Is Bruxism the Same as a TMJ Disorder?

No. Bruxism refers to grinding or clenching, TMJ names the jaw joint, and TMD refers to disorders involving the joint or nearby muscles. These concerns may overlap, but having one does not establish the other. If you have persistent jaw pain, locking, or difficulty opening, seek an evaluation from an appropriate healthcare professional rather than assuming a nightguard will resolve it.

Ask About Nightguards for Bruxism in Braintree

Our team can assess signs of grinding, explain changes in your teeth, and discuss whether a custom nightguard or restorative care makes sense for your situation. We want you to understand the reasons behind each recommendation.

To discuss a dental examination for grinding or a custom nightguard with Dr. George Salem and Associates, PC, call [lct_phone] or request an appointment with our Braintree dental team.