



Paedodontic Society of South Africa

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Let me ask you Doc?

Does my child suffer from Bruxism?

by Dr Sameera Yusufmia (Bchd, Dip Clin Dent)



Bruxism is defined as the involuntary grinding of teeth especially at night. It results in wear of tooth surfaces due to tooth to tooth contact i.e. attrition.

How can I check?

You will either notice the **noise** created by the child grinding his teeth during sleep or you will actually see the physical “shortening” of certain teeth.

What is it caused by?

Many theories have been suggested and include

A) Psychological factors:

- a) Stress- due to a new environment, a divorce, issues at school etc.
- b) Overactive children-These children tend to burn off extra energy at night by grinding!

B) Inner ear:

This relates to the pressure that may build up. Children grind to try and equalize any pressure changes.

C) Disproportionate jaws:

The top and bottom teeth may not fit together comfortably.

D) Side effects of medication:

Children that may suffer from cerebral palsy may be on medication that contributes to grinding.

What can be done?

1. Visit the dentist to confirm possible causes and to assess the severity.
2. Different management approaches are necessary depending on the cause:
 - A. **Stress management** - it may help to talk to your child about any tension or fears before going to bed. Reading a favorite book or a warm bath may relax them as well.
 - B. **Self care** - many processed foods have additives that may contribute to “hyperactivity”. It may be a worthwhile exercise to cut down on such foods and assess the difference in behavior.
 - C. **Dental approaches** - Mouth guards may be made in some cases for the child to wear at night. In severe cases the dentist may suggest placing stainless steel crowns. Some children may be referred to other specialists if their jaws are a problem.

The good news is that most children do outgrow bruxism. The grinding gets less between 6-9 and actually stops between 9-12.