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Feeling stressed...and jaw pain? WDA gives tips on managing stress-related dental conditions

WEST ALLIS, Wis. – Proper stress management can go a long way, especially when it comes to your oral health. As the COVID-19 pandemic persists, dentists across the country and here in Wisconsin are continuing to see an increase in patients with dental conditions often associated with stress and anxiety.

“Wisconsin dentists are having a lot of conversations with patients about stress, teeth grinding and clenching at night,” said Dr. Jay Banez, a general dentist who practices in Whitewater and Delavan. “If you’re feeling stressed and experiencing symptoms like dull headaches, jaw soreness, sore chewing muscles and painful or loose teeth, you may be grinding or clenching your teeth during sleep. This can lead to worse oral health consequences like chipped or cracked teeth or temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorder if not addressed early on.”

In a poll conducted late last year by the [American Dental Association’s Health and Policy Institute](#), dentists reported a spike in stress-related dental conditions since the start of the pandemic. According to the poll, 69% of dentists saw an increase in patients grinding or clenching teeth, and 63% were seeing more patients with chipped or cracked teeth. The Wisconsin Dental Association is giving tips on how to reduce the severity of stress-related dental conditions:

- **Use a mouth guard at night.** If you’re grinding your teeth or clenching at night, talk with your dentist about being fitted for a mouth guard. A mouth guard is a simple solution to protecting wear and tear on your teeth while you sleep. In some cases, your dentist may recommend a mild muscle relaxer during acute episodes of nighttime clenching and grinding.
- **Find ways to relax and manage stress.** Stress management looks different for everyone, but it’s important to work stress-reducing activities into your daily routine. Try to get at least 10 minutes of physical activity in a day. This will help to release some of the built-up tension in the body that can sometimes manifest itself into the form of clenching/grinding at night. Meditation and counseling can also help reduce stress and anxiety.
- **Avoid alcohol, caffeine and smoking.** These three are all proven to worsen tooth grinding at night.
- **Evaluate your nighttime routine.** What is your nightly routine? Try to limit your screen time on cell phones, computers, tablets and televisions before bed. Doing activities that are restful, quiet and promote peace such as reading, meditating or writing down your thoughts will quiet your mind before sleep. Focus on quality sleep by having a dark bedroom, a good mattress and a great pillow. These steps can make a difference and decrease the chances of clenching and grinding your teeth while you’re resting.
- **Continue to see your dentist every six months.** Regularly scheduled dental visits are great opportunities for you to check in with your dentist and ask questions about your conditions.

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Remember, clenching and grinding can cause wear on your teeth, therefore other dental conditions may arise as a result and may need to be addressed.

“As we continue to adjust our daily routines to stay safe and manage stress during the pandemic, remember that our oral health care routines may also need attention,” said Dr. Jay Banez. “A simple adjustment like wearing a mouth guard at night can protect your teeth from more damage.”

For more information about stress-related dental conditions and tips on your oral health, visit www.wda.org and www.mouthhealthy.org.

About the Wisconsin Dental Association

The Wisconsin Dental Association, with 3,100 member dentists and a number of dental hygienists, is the leading voice for dentistry in Wisconsin. WDA members are committed to promoting professional excellence and quality oral health care. Established in 1870, the WDA is headquartered in West Allis and has a legislative office in Madison. The WDA is affiliated with the American Dental Association - the largest and oldest national dental association in the world. For more information, call 414-276-4520, visit WDA.org and find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).