

Teeth grinding – what you need to know

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DENTISTS in Australia have noticed a spike in teeth grinding after the pandemic started.

Teeth grinding can be painful for the teeth and gums, in the joints and muscles of the jaw. At its worst, it can be so painful that it affects the quality of life.

Dr. Alexander Holden, a Clinical Associate Professor, and colleague Dr. Dale Howes, an Associate Professor of Prosthodontics, both of the University of Sydney, have written a very well explained article on teeth grinding in The Conversation, an Australian news site.

They are specialist dentists who teach, research and practice in prosthodontics (Dr. Howes) and community dentistry (Dr. Holden).

The top and bottom teeth are designed to meet when they need to, for example when biting and chewing food, they explain. And that happens only a few times during the day.

When one's mouth is closed or when one is not eating or chewing, the teeth and jaws are not in contact.

That is why when teeth grinding occurs, the contact could be more than naturally intended. Too much grinding could wear off the teeth in due time.

More than that, the joints in the lower jaw attached to the skull has a disc that controls how the jaw joints move. Too much teeth grinding can dislocate the disc and may compromise its function.

Stress may cause teeth grinding, say Drs. Holden and Howes. Stress can contribute to a habit of jaw clenching or teeth grinding, they explain.

What to do? "The first step is becoming aware you're grinding and clenching, and making an often subconscious behavior into one that we can control and stop," they write.

"Dental practitioners are trained to check the health and status of the jaw joints and the muscles that help you to chew.

"A dental check-up can help reveal the signs of teeth grinding and jaw clenching, which can include cracked teeth and fillings, worn crowns or cusps (which is what the elevated