

Stress brings out dental issues

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MANY people have been under stress during this ongoing pandemic. And it shows as oral health issues. According to the American Dental Association (ADA), many dentists have observed oral health conditions related to stress brought about by the pandemic.

A survey made last October by the ADA's Health Policy Institute shows that dentists have reported an increase in stress-related conditions, such as jaw grinding or clenching, chipped teeth, and cracked teeth.

The ADA survey showed that seven in 10 or 69 percent of dentists observed an increase in patients grinding and clenching their teeth. Six in 10 or 63 percent of the dentists surveyed have observed more patients with chipped teeth and cracked teeth.

These oral health issues may be linked to stress, Alison Bowen of the Chicago Tribune reports. Some dentists have seen the greatest number of cracked teeth in the last two years, Ms. Bowen says. Many patients are coming in with broken teeth, dentists tell her.

"People are clenching more, grinding more, cracking more teeth," Dr. Rana Stino, a dentist, told her.

"Stino has seen more of all of these issues, and that creates conversations with patients about how they might be experiencing stress. Some aren't even aware they are grinding their teeth if it's happening at night. Especially at the beginning of the pandemic, when a dentist's office might be one of the few places

patients actually went, they disclosed stress about losing jobs or juggling kids at home," Ms. Bowen writes.

"You can see some really prominent wear patterns on their teeth, you can see some cheek biting marks, those are textbook signs," Dr. Stino told her.

"She'll also refer patients to physical therapists for pain in their necks, shoulders and backs," Ms. Bowen continues. "Patients may also complain of headaches or ringing in their ears. All of these symptoms can be rooted in clenching and grinding that, left untreated, creates jaw pain."

In nearly 13 years of practice, Ms. Bowen writes, dentist Dr. Karen Fields has seen an unprecedented level of stress-related dental issues.

"The pandemic has created a heightened level of stress, which has led to a psychosocial habit of grinding and clenching teeth," she told the Chicago Tribune. "With increased stressors, we tend to take them out on our teeth."

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