

Grinding Your Teeth?

IF THE PLUMMETTING STOCKMARKET IS GRINDING AWAY AT YOUR FINANCES, IT MAY ALSO BE GRINDING YOUR TEETH. DON'T LET THE DOW DO A NUMBER ON YOUR DENTAL WORK

Dotcom pink slip parties, Hamptons home foreclosures, hiring freezes, all symptoms of a weakened economy reminiscent of the late We. When investors see their stock portfolios shrink, this leads to one thing: stress. Although stress can wreak havoc on the body in many ways, one of the most common is a condition called Bruxism, or most commonly tooth grinding. Dr. Ramin Tabib is a Manhattan dentist who counts as his patient population numerous high powered CEO's and Wall Street power brokers. He has noticed a direct correlation between the precarious economy and evidence of tooth grinding in his dental patients.

As Dr. Tabib explains, "a person who awakes with dull headaches or vise-like pain may be one of thousands in this country who grind their teeth. Many are unaware that they even have the disorder because it often occurs during sleep, it is wise to visit a dentist who can usually detect the tell-tale signs of wear on the teeth." Bruxism is often a way of alleviating tension, anxiety, or nervousness. It can even keep a person awake at night. During waking hours, people relieve stress by clenching more than grinding. A tooth gearing problem may act as a trigger for the bruxing which can result in muscle spasms and lead to more painful symptoms.

What are the long-term affects of grinding? Dr. Tabib says that, "bruxing can damage the teeth and the supporting structures as well as producing painful symptoms. People with abnormal gearing of the teeth are unconsciously trying to grind away what does not fit well in their mouths." Unfortunately, the person rarely grinds in the primary area, that is, where the teeth conflict the most. Rather they shift to other areas and grind those teeth out of proper gearing. This happens because teeth that do not gear correctly are neurologically sensitive. This sensitivity may not produce pain, however. The body protects itself in ways the person is not conscious of. This protective mechanism will lead the person to grind elsewhere in the mouth. A dentist can observe that some patients have ground their teeth just about everywhere except where the primary interference exists.

How can tooth grinding be treated? Dr. Tabib says that, "a dentist will determine which single treatment or combination of treatments is right for a patient. When stress is the major cause of bruxism, people need to find ways to relax. People who have difficulty handling stress may need to seek counseling or the dentist may prescribe muscle relaxants to relax jaw muscles. To help alleviate muscle pain; physical therapy may be needed."

Dr. Tabib recommends the following tips to prevent grinding:

To help break the habit, place reminders around the house, or try repeating phrases that help you relax.

To help relax clenching muscles, apply a warm washcloth to the side of your face.

To relieve stress, cut down on caffeine, take warm baths and ease up on yourself.

Because it is thought that an abnormal bite may predispose a person to grinding, treatment may involve removing the "high spots" of a tooth. Another treatment involves wearing a plastic mouth guard at night to prevent tooth grinding. A bite plate is a removable plastic device, which prevents teeth from coming together. In some cases, such as with an overbite, it may eventually improve the bite. A method used to treat the damage caused by more serious cases of grinding involves reshaping or reconstruction of the biting surfaces with crowns or inlays. Grinding is a common occurrence among many people at some time or another. If you develop facial pain, fatigue or other problems, treatment may be needed. Talk with your dentist if you suspect that you are grinding your teeth. The bottom line is: don't let the Dow do a number on your dental work.