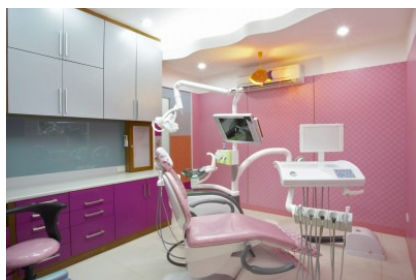


Do You Make Noises While You Sleep?



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“You are so noisy at night!” Have you ever had your parents or spouse *complain* that you make noises when you sleep?

“Do I snore?” you may ask. You can be right, but on other occasions you may be told that you are not snoring but making odd squeaks with a “*jig jig*” sound.

“Is there something wrong with myself?” you may wonder.

“Absolutely not,” I would say, “but you are grinding your teeth when you sleep at night!”

With Hong Kong’s long working hours and fast pace, many people here experience stress and anxiety. Accounting can be a stressful career. The long working hours, especially during the peak seasons (such as the auditing period); the stress in meeting client deadlines with little time for rest; the pressure in meeting accounting standards and working to a high degree of accuracy; the anxiety in doing a job that needs a great deal of concentration... All these factors mean that accounting personnel are strong potential candidates for *bruxism*.

Bruxism refers to the habitual activity of grinding teeth while sleeping. It would appear that *bruxism* has been on the increase in Hong Kong. Although there has been no official survey on how many people suffer from this complaint, many people are complaining about the sharp noises made from teeth grinding, mostly when they are sleeping. There is still no definite reason for *bruxism* but stress is one of the predisposing factors.

The habit of grinding teeth usually happens during sleep, so one might not be aware of the problem. Due to the lack of awareness, *bruxism* often causes severe and irreversible damage to teeth before person concerned is conscious of the situation. People with *bruxism* can see their teeth shortened and the biting surfaces completely flattened by the age of 30, as the enamel (the outermost layer of a tooth) is abraded. People suffering from *bruxism* can also find their teeth sensitive when eating hard, sweet, cold or even hot foods, as the dentine (the middle layer of a tooth) has been exposed, stimulating the tooth pulp (the innermost layer of a tooth lined with nerves and blood vessels) while they are eating. This means that *bruxism* sufferers aged 30 may have teeth that look like those of a 70-year-old. Elderly *bruxers* may find all their teeth destroyed, in which case they would need to have all their teeth extracted and be fitted with dentures.



In some cases reported in dental clinics, people with *bruxism* wake up from their sleep because of toothache. This happens when a large portion of the tooth structure has been abraded, exposing the tooth pulp. Bacteria will infiltrate the tooth pulp and this results in *pulpitis* (the inflammation of the nerves of a tooth). In this kind of case, advanced dental treatment on the tooth pulp called root canal therapy is required. Rare cases have also been reported in which the tooth grinding is so strong that people crack and fracture their teeth during their sleep. These cracked teeth then have to be removed.

People usually only become aware of their *bruxism* habit when parents or a sleeping partner tells them about it. They are advised to visit a dentist as soon as possible if they find out that they have this problem in order to prevent further damage to their teeth. Generally speaking, *bruxism* in children aged between two and ten years is only transitional, and it may stop once they grow up. However, it is unusual for *bruxism* in adults and the elderly to stop and the condition cannot be fully cured. Dentists can only take preventive measures to stop further damage done by *bruxism*.

The most common preventive measures include the following:

1. If dentine has been exposed, avoid food that is too sweet or too acidic, as this will induce tooth sensitivity.
2. Use fluoride mouthwash regularly.
3. Wear a mouthguard or acrylic dental splint to prevent further damage to the teeth.
4. Have regular dental check-ups and seek dental advice if you suffer from *bruxism*.