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B1

Taking it out on their teeth

Dentists link surge in patients who grind their teeth to economic stress

By Camille Sweeney

With economic pressures affecting millions of Americans, dentists may have noticed a drop in patients opting for a brighter smile, but they are seeing another phenomenon: A rise in the number of teeth grinders.

"I'm seeing a lot more people that are anxious, stressed out and very concerned about their financial futures and they're taking it out on their teeth," said Dr. Steven Butensky, a dentist with a specialty in prosthodontics (aesthetic, implant and reconstructive dentistry) in Manhattan.

One of his patients lost hundreds of thousands of dollars invested with Bernard L. Madoff. Another reported that he had lost a job with a seven-figure salary. A third, a single mother with a floral design business on Long Island, said she was working twice as hard for half as much.

"All three are grinders, directly affected by what's going on out there," Butensky said, gesturing outside his Midtown office window.

Dr. Robert Rawdin, another Manhattan dentist with a specialty in prosthodontics, said he had seen 20 to 25 per cent more patients with teeth grinding symptoms in the last year. And in San Diego, Dr. Gerald McCracken said that over the last 18 months, his number of cases had more than doubled. They, along with other dentists interviewed for this article, chalk it up to the economy.

"We're finding in a lot of double-income families, we have the people who have lost jobs and are worried, and then we have the spouse, who still has the job, with the added pressure and uncertainty," McCracken said. "This can cause some real grinding at night."

With or without economic hardship, 10 to 15 per cent of adult Americans moderately to severely grind their teeth, according to Dr. Matthew Messina, a dentist in Cleveland and a consumer adviser for the American Dental Association.

Because it is a subconscious muscle activity, most grinders grind without realizing it, until a symptom such as a fragmented tooth or facial soreness occurs.

While many experts believe that genetics may play a role in bruxism (or teeth grinding), stress has long been known to set off

clenching and grinding in some people, Messina said.

"Recession breeds stress and our body responds to stressful events so in times like these, the incidence of bruxism goes up," he said, adding that over the last year or so he had heard from dentists around the country who had seen an uptick in patients with bruxism while also complaining about financial stress. In his own practice, he said he had treated twice as many cases in the last year than in the year before.

"Stress, whether it's real or perceived, causes flight-or-fight hormones to release in the body," he said. "Those released stress hormones mobilize energy, causing isometric activity, which is muscle movement, because that built-up energy has to be released in some way."

The most expensive option for rebuilding teeth damaged by grinding is with veneers, but this year, dentists say that many of their bruxism patients are requesting one of the least costly treatments: a night guard, also known as an occlusal splint. Manufacturers said sales of these devices had gone up.

"Our night guard sales have increased 15 per cent over the prior year," said Greg Pelissier, a manager at Glidewell Laboratories, a maker of custom restorative, reconstructive and cosmetic dental products based in Newport Beach, Calif.

New drugstore products have also come to market, including a disposable night guard, Grind-No-More (about \$30 for 14 guards). Its makers hope it will appeal to on-again-off-again grinders.

Stan Goff, executive editor of Dental Products Report, an online publication, wrote in an e-mail message that all this teeth grinding "may be playing a role in the introduction of several new products designed to not only prevent bruxism, but to help fight against tooth sensitivity" and other conditions that are aggravated by

grinding.

While experts believe bruxism is not a dental disorder per se, but rather originates in the central nervous system, the condition can greatly affect the teeth and the entire craniofacial structure.

"Normally, we exert about 20 to 30 pounds per square inch on our back molars when we chew," Rawdin said. "But teeth grinders, es-

pecially at night without restraint, can exert up to as much as 200 pounds per square inch on their teeth."

Some nocturnal grinders will grind up to 40 minutes of every hour of sleep. The relentless wear and tear can quickly erode enamel (10 times faster than that of nongrinders), fracture teeth, affect bite and damage the temporomandibular joint at the hinge of the jaw, and the masseter muscle, which controls the jaws. Jaw and face pain, as well as earaches and headaches, may also occur.

"I kind of thought I was going crazy," said Adrienne Lee Kornstein, 48, a patient of Butensky's, has suffered because of the economy. "A tooth broke for what seemed like no reason, and by the time I got to Dr. Butensky, I'd been to my physician, other dentists, even a dermatologist to try to get relief from migraines and facial pain I was taking painkillers for. I had no idea I was grinding or that grinding your teeth could even lead to all that."

The most common treatment for the disorder is to wear a night guard, which may not only alleviate grinding but, in some cases, train someone to stop grinding altogether.

Fitted in the dentist's office, a custom guard is usually a clear, hard plastic device that runs over the top or lower teeth from front to back and prevents the top and bottom molars from making contact.

Although not cheap (the price can range from \$350 to \$1,000 US), most dentists prefer a custom guard to over-the-counter guards, which are usually made of softer material and can encourage chewing and exacerbate masseter muscle activity.

There are also smaller prefabricated splints that a dentist can customize. These are generally cheaper than the fitted full arch guards and require fewer adjustments. But some dentists argue they are not as effective as the full arch guards.

Many teeth grinders interviewed said they would not go to bed without their night guards.

New York Times News Service

Night mouth guards can ease bruxism or grinding of teeth, dentists say



PIOTR REDLINSKI, THE NEW YORK TIMES

Enjoy Thanksgiving, but don't stuff yourself

Thanksgiving means gathering with family and friends and feasting on great food. We celebrate Thanksgiving by eating wonderful comfort foods.

Trying not to overeat is always a challenge, especially with all the high-calorie- and fat-loaded dishes like potatoes, stuffing, breads, gravy and the infamous pumpkin pie.

According to some research, the average Thanksgiving meal is a whopping 3,000 calories.

Nibble your way through some leftovers, and you could be consuming more than 4,000 calories in one day.

For most of us, that's twice as many calories as we should be eating on a daily basis.

There are a few ways of dealing with your dinner approach. One is you decide it is a special day that happens once a year, indulge and eat all of our favourite things. The other is to avoid celebrating with family, avoiding these foods altogether.

Well, it doesn't have to be all or



MARLA ARNDT
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nothing!

You can enjoy your Thanksgiving dinner without having to deprive yourself.

Just try and include healthier versions of the traditional favourites. Most recipes can be "made over" by reducing fat, calories and sugars and increasing fibre and protein, boosting the nutritional values.

Whether you are a guest at the event or the chef, here are some ideas to get you through the celebration not feeling stuffed like the turkey.

As a guest:

- Don't go to Thanksgiving dinner

hungry. We often eat faster and more when we are hungry — therefore eat a wholesome breakfast and lunch on the day to avoid overeating at dinner time.

- Bring a dish you know is healthy.

Make a large colourful salad or bake a healthier casserole. Not only will you be the thoughtful guest, you will be able to fill your plate leaving less room for high fat choices.

- Thanksgiving dinner is not an all-you-can-eat buffet. Fill your plate half with vegetables, one quarter with a lean meat and the rest with a starch of your choice. Eat slowly and stop when you are full.

- Turkey — go skinless. Choose your four-ounce turkey portion skinless to slash away some fat and cholesterol. Save your appetite for the side dishes and desserts.

- Side dishes — watch your portion size: Go for smaller portions. This way you can sample all the different foods. Moderation is always the key.

- Make a conscious choice to limit high fat items: High fat food items can be found in fried and creamy dishes as well as cheese-filled casseroles in a traditional Thanksgiving meal.

For instance, mashed potatoes are usually made with butter and milk; green bean casseroles are often prepared with cream of mushroom soup, cheese and milk and topped with fried onions; candied yams are loaded with cream, sugar and marshmallows.

If you cannot control the ingredients that go in to a dish, simply limit yourself to a smaller helping size.

- Again moderation is the key.
- Drink plenty of water: alcohol and coffee can dehydrate your body. Drink calorie-free water instead.

If you are the host or chef:

- Substitute high fat ingredients with lower-fat or fat-free ingredients. There are many ways to make your current recipe great tasting

with less the calories and fat. Experiment with recipes. There are many websites that offer ideas to "makeover" any recipe.

- Leftover turkey does not need to be made into sandwiches. Use the leftover turkey to make a pot of soup with fresh chunky vegetables.

- Send guests home with the leftover foods that may tempt you. Take the extra pie pumpkin pie to a soup kitchen.

Focus on your family and friends during the holiday, and all of the other things you can be thankful for.

Remember to count your blessings this holiday season, and the changes you make today will keep you beautiful, inside and out, for the rest of the year.

Happy Thanksgiving everyone.

Guelph-based personal trainer Marla Arndt owns and operates Frameworks Fitness Studio. She can be reached via her website at www.frameworksfitness.com. Her column appears every other week.

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