

# your HEALTH

**GET IN TOUCH:**  
Have you struggled with a difficult health problem? We want to tell your story. Contact our health correspondent  
Cathy Buss on 0116 222 4261, email catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk

**T**his month, dentist Dr Adam Patel looks at bruxism, more commonly known as teeth grinding, which he describes as “a very common phenomenon”.

He said: “At least a quarter of the population will be affected by it at some stage of their life and it can lead to secondary problems with the teeth, jaw pain, headaches and even earaches.”

Never heard of bruxism? About a quarter of us are affected by it. Dentist **DR ADAM PATEL** explains



## WHY DO WE DO IT?

Teeth grinding is based on unconscious movement of the chewing muscles.

The precise cause is unknown, but contributory factors include stress, anxiety, sleep disorders, an abnormal bite or teeth that are misaligned or crooked.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM GRINDING MY TEETH?

Often patients are unaware of a grinding habit because it occurs most frequently during sleep.

However, a dull, constant headache, especially in the temporal regions or a tender or painful jaw, especially on awakening is a symptom of bruxism.

People often first learn that they grind their teeth from their partner who notices the grinding during sleep.

## WHAT SYMPTOMS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH IT?

They include, but are not limited to the following:

- Dull headaches
- Jaw joint tenderness
- Facial tenderness
- Difficulty with jaw opening
- Teeth that are tender or feel loose
- Fractured or worn teeth
- Fractured or worn fillings
- Cheek trauma

## CAN OTHER ILLNESSES AFFECT IT?

Huntington's disease, Parkinson's disease, and cerebral palsy may lead to teeth grinding. All three affect motor control of the body.

## WHY IS IT HARMFUL?

Prolonged grinding can result in fracturing, wearing, loosening or even loss of teeth. Long-term grinders often wear teeth down to stumps.

Teeth can also become painful and tender while the gum tissue surrounding the teeth can recede.

It can also affect your jaw and jaw joints, result in joint pain, earache, changes in facial musculature tone and general facial pain.

Grinding can lead to temporomandibular joint – the joint of the jaw – related diseases, and even change a person's facial appearance.

## DO CHILDREN GRIND THEIR TEETH?

Up to one third of children grind their teeth, usually at two peak times – when their baby teeth begin to emerge and when their permanent teeth are erupting.

OTHER tips to help you stop teeth grinding include:

- Avoid alcohol. Grinding tends to intensify after alcohol consumption.
- Avoid or cut back on foods and drinks that contain caffeine, such as cola, chocolate, tea and coffee, especially close to when you are about to sleep.
- Do not chew on pens or pencils or anything that is not food. Avoid chewing gum as it allows your jaw

muscles to familiarise to clenching and makes you more likely to grind your teeth.

- Train yourself not to clench or grind your teeth. If you notice that you clench or grind during the day,

position the tip of your tongue between your teeth. This practice trains your jaw muscles to relax.

- Relax your jaw muscles at night by holding a warm flannel against your cheek in front of your earlobe.

# Escape the daily grind

Most children lose the habit after each of these sets of teeth have come through fully.

Most commonly, children grind their teeth during sleep. Again, the causes as to why they grind their teeth are unknown, but things to consider include improperly aligned teeth or irregular contact between upper and lower teeth, illnesses and other medical conditions as well as psychological factors, including anxiety and stress.

Grinding of the baby teeth rarely results in problems.

If a child's teeth look worn or they complain of

toothache parents should consult their dentists

## HOW CAN I STOP?

If you suspect that you are grinding your teeth then speak with your dentist.

He or she can examine your mouth and jaw for signs of bruxism, such as jaw tenderness and abnormalities within your mouth and with your teeth.

Your dentist may be able to fit you with a customised acrylic mouth guard to protect your teeth from the shearing effects of grinding during sleep.

If there are abnormalities noticed with your bite, or misaligned teeth then specific dental treatments may be offered to aid resolution.

If stress is a contributory factor causing you to grind your teeth, then lifestyle factors need to be evaluated and you may wish to speak to your doctor about the options available to you to help reduce your stress levels.

Attending stress counselling, starting an exercise programme, seeing a physiotherapist or obtaining a prescription for muscle relaxants are among some of the options that may be offered.



THE Leicester Mercury has teamed up with Leicestershire dentist Dr Adam Patel (pictured) to help readers with any dental and oral health problems.

People are invited to send in any questions and Dr Patel will answer a selection of them through an occasional column in the Leicester Mercury's Monday Woman section.

Dr Patel said: “I hope I will be able to help people with information and advice which they can put into practice.

“My experience in seeing

## ASK THE EXPERT

patients is that there is quite a lack of dental and oral health information and education.

“Your mouth is the start of your digestive system and people often don't realise there is a distinct link between oral and general health.

“It can also have a big impact on a person's psychological and social wellbeing. Bad oral health is very visible and can impact on as-

pects of life, from a person's personal life to getting a job.”

Dr Patel, who was educated at the City of Leicester School and Sixth Form College, said: “I hope I will be able to help readers with the information I can provide.”

Dr Patel's replies should only be used as a reference – he is not a replacement for your own dentist. If you have a query you would

like to raise please summarise it in about 200 words and e-mail it to the address below. Put “health questions” in the subject line.

Or, send your 200-word summary to Cathy Buss, Health Questions, Leicester Mercury, St George Street, Leicester, LE1 9FQ.

Please include a contact name and phone number in case we have any queries about your submission. These details will not be published.

Dr Patel will not be able to send personal responses to letters. catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk