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TOOTH GRINDING PRODUCES EXPENSIVE PROBLEMS

DALLAS --For many people, life is a grind. The stress of life causes some people to grind their teeth.

But adults aren't the only ones affected--children grind their teeth, too. Although it is normal at certain stages in a child's development, prolonged tooth grinding can cause jaw pain and permanent damage.

Dr. Joel Steinberg, professor of pediatrics at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas said transient periods of tooth grinding are quite common in children who are cutting new teeth or whose permanent teeth are growing in. "Usually children who are 2 or 3 years old and 8 or 9 years old will grind their teeth for a while as new teeth come in or when new teeth create an uneven biting surface," he said. If tooth grinding continues, he recommends consulting the child's dentist.

Teen-agers who grind their teeth in their sleep, however, may do so as a result of stress. If it persists, Steinberg said, severe abrasion of the teeth can occur. Such teens, like adults, may need stress-management counseling.

Steinberg said it is also common for children with neurological abnormalities or injuries to grind their teeth. These children usually need special protective splints, which must be custom-made from rubber, silicone or hard plastic. Dr. Douglas Sinn, chairman of oral and maxillofacial surgery and holder of the Robert V. Walker, D.D.S, Chair in Oral Surgery at UT Southwestern, said they ordinarily

(More)

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cover the lower and upper teeth and are worn up to 24 hours a day, depending upon the patient. They cost between \$250 and \$300.

"This may sound expensive, but it's nothing compared to what it would cost to repair the damage that can be done if the tooth grinding continues unabated," Sinn said.

The teeth can be worn down so far that the individual requires crowns or oral surgery to repair or remove cracked teeth, Sinn said. In extreme cases, clenching or grinding teeth also can cause persistent pain in the temporomandibular joint in the jaw.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School, affiliated teaching hospitals and outpatient clinics.