Bruxism
Bruxism refers to an oral parafunctional activity which occurs with most people at some point in their lives. The grinding of the teeth and the clenching of the jaw are the two main characteristics of this condition, which can occur either during the day or at night. Bruxism is one of the most common known sleep disorders and causes most of its damage during sleeping hours. The clenching and grinding, which accompanies bruxism, is symptomatic of a malfunctioning chewing reflex, which is turned off in non-sufferers when sleeping. For sufferers, deep sleep or even naps, cause the reflex nerve control center in the brain to turn off, and the reflex pathways to become active.

Typically, the incisors and canines (front 6 upper and lower teeth) of opposing arches grind against each other laterally. This side-to-side action puts undue strain on the medial pterygoid muscles and the temporomandibular joints. Earache, depression, headaches, eating disorders and anxiety are amongst the most common symptoms of bruxism; which often accompanies chronic stress, Alzheimer’s disease and alcohol abuse.

Reasons for the treatment of bruxism
Here are some of the main reasons why bruxism should be promptly treated:

• Gum recession and tooth loss – Bruxism is one of the leading causes of gum recession and tooth loss; firstly because it damages the soft tissue directly, and secondly because it leads to loose teeth and deep pockets where bacteria can hide and destroy the supporting bone.
• Occlusal trauma – The abnormal wear patterns on the occlusal (chewing) surfaces can lead to fractures in the teeth, which may require restorative treatment.
• Arthritis – In severe and chronic cases, bruxing can eventually lead to painful arthritis in the temporomandibular (TMJ) joints (the joints that allow the jaw to open smoothly).
• Myofascial pain – The grinding associated with bruxism can eventually shorten and blunt the teeth. This can lead to muscle pain in the myofascial region and debilitating headaches.

Treatment options for bruxism
There is no single cure for bruxism, though a variety of helpful devices and tools are available. Here are some common ways in which bruxism is treated:

• Mouth guards – An acrylic mouth guard can be designed to help minimize the abrasive action of tooth surfaces during normal sleep.
Mouth guards should be worn on a long-term basis to help prevent tooth damage, damage to the temporomandibular joint and help to stabilize the occlusion.

• **NTI-tss device** – This device is fitted by a health professional and only covers the front teeth. The goal of the NTI-tss is to prevent the grinding of the rear molars by limiting the contraction of the temporalis muscle.

• **Botox®** – Botox® can be injected into the muscles to relax them. Botox® is an excellent treatment for bruxism because it relaxes the muscles enough to prevent the grinding, but not enough to interfere with everyday functions like chewing and speaking.

Other methods of treatment that may help include relaxation exercises and stress management.

*If you have questions or concerns about bruxism, please ask your dentist.*