

# Relax For a Better Smile: How Stress Can Affect Your Oral Health

By Delta Dental

**H**ave you been feeling stressed or anxious lately? Talk to your dentist. A number of stress-related disorders can affect your mouth. Seeing your dentist twice a year for exams and cleaning can help prevent or identify and treat these problems.

## TEETH GRINDING (BRUXISM)

What is it? Bruxism is the technical term for grinding your teeth and clenching your jaw.

### Causes

- Stress and anxiety
- Sleep disorders
- Abnormal bite and missing or crooked teeth

### Symptoms

Nervous tension, anger and frustration can be accompanied by these signs in the mouth:

- Teeth with flat tips
- Sensitive teeth
- Tongue indentations
- Decreasing tooth enamel

## TMJ (TEMPOROMANDIBULAR DISORDERS)

What is it? TMJ (also known as TMD) refers to a group of conditions affecting the temporomandibular (jaw) joint and associated muscles. Stressful situations can aggravate TMJ by causing you to overuse jaw muscles.

### Causes

- Stress
- Clenching or grinding teeth

### Symptoms

- Popping or clicking of the jaw
- Jaw joint pain
- Teeth with flat tips
- Decreasing tooth enamel

## GUM DISEASE (PERIODONTITIS)

What is it? Gum disease is a bacterial infection which causes chronic inflammation of the gums and surrounding tissue. It is the major cause of adult tooth loss and affects nearly 80% of people at some point in their life. In its early stages, the disease is known as gingivitis, before progressing into periodontitis, or gum disease

### Causes

The most commonly known causes of gum disease are poor oral hygiene, poor diet and smoking. You may be surprised to know that stress is a risk factor for gum disease and can increase its severity. It can also decrease the effectiveness of treatments.

### Symptoms

- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that bleed while brushing or flossing
- Gums that pull away from the teeth
- Teeth that are loose or separating from each other
- Persistent bad breath or a bad taste in the mouth
- A change in the fit of dentures

## MAINTAIN YOUR ORAL HEALTH WHEN STRESSED

### See your dentist.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, it's a good idea to see your dentist. Your dentist may be able to recommend specific treatments if you have bruxism or TMJ.

### Take the time to unwind.

Consider ways to relieve stress by engaging in relaxing activities such as meditation, massage or yoga. You may even find exercise, physical therapy or counseling to be a good outlet to reduce tension.

### Consider nightguards.

These devices are worn while sleeping and relax the jaw by acting as a cushioning barrier between the teeth.

