

Influence of Stress Caused by COVID-19 in the Increase of Bruxism

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ABSTRACT

Bruxism is the involuntary habit of clenching or grinding dental structures without functional purposes. Bruxism affects between 10% and 20% of the population; and can lead to headache and pain in the muscles, jaw, neck and ear. They also pose, in many cases, problems of a certain severity in the function of chewing and swallowing food. Apart from the fact that, sometimes, bruxism can be related to malocclusion, that is, to the bad gear between the jaw and the maxilla, some of the main causes for which this pathology develops are closely related to stress, fatigue or anxiety. In this sense, given the situation we are experiencing, in which home confinement by COVID-19 can cause, in some people, anxiety disorders, disorders related to bruxism and Temporo Mandibular Joint (TMJ) may be aggravated during these weeks.

Keywords: Bruxism; COVID-19; Stress; Sleep disorder; Coronavirus

INTRODUCTION

It is an involuntary habit, it makes people clench their jaws tightly or grind their teeth, rubbing or sliding them, mechanically and it can have consequences that even affect quality of life.

The clenching of the teeth at a given moment is not of great importance, but if it occurs in a prolonged and uncontrolled way, even while we sleep, we are facing a problem that can end up causing pain in the area of the jaw or neck (vertebrae), until insomnia episodes that do not allow enough rest [1].

This pathology, which can occur at any age, occurs when there is a dysfunction in the Temporo Mandibular Joint (TMJ). TMJ influences dental occlusion, making it possible for us to perform functions as simple as talking or chewing.

Stress, tension, together with a bad occlusion or what we would call "bad biting", are the factors that can trigger bruxism. This repetitive and unconscious clenching of the teeth causes the logical wear of the dental pieces and can even cause small injuries to the mouth. In addition, experts point out that sometimes headaches or migraines can be related to this abnormality [2].

Increase of cases during quarantine

In the last month, my observation as director for 25 years at the Dental Clinic coincides with the comments of the world dental community; in the dental emergencies attended, an exaggerated number of new patients have been observed who now present

signs and symptoms derived from clenching the teeth, which were previously asymptomatic.

Most common signs derived from clenching teeth

- Fractures and wear of teeth (pathognomonic sign of the disease)
- Leaks and loss of restorations and fixed prostheses
- Wear on molar surfaces
- Face and joint pain
- Difficulty, pain when opening and closing the mouth
- Dental mobility
- Wounds on the mucosa of the cheek and appearance of sialoliths
- Tooth sensitivity

Types of bruxism and possible treatments

This ailment can occur when the person is awake or while sleeping. In this second case, in addition to pressing, there is also an unconscious movement of grinding and brushing the upper teeth with the lower ones, displacing them laterally.

According to a review by various authors and studies in the scientific medical literature, the prevalence of nighttime bruxism among the adult population is approximately 12%.

Today, because of confinement, anxiety has generated an exponential increase in people who manifest conscious and

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unconscious bruxism. It is estimated that its increase is reaching 38% of people.

Bruxism can end up disappearing spontaneously, especially if its origin has to do with a temporary stress situation, but sometimes it is necessary to alleviate its discomfort by following certain treatments [3].

As far as possible, the following tips should be taken into account:

- Try to maintain fixed schedules and the usual routine especially that related to sleeping hours
- Practice exercise at home, depending on the level you previously have. You don't have to exercise for a marathon, but you do need to be active. Sport, in addition to benefiting the physical state of our body, also helps to relax the mind
- If you suffer from anxiety, avoid over-information, especially at the last minute of the day
- Take time every day to carry out activities that encourage and keep in touch with family and friends
- If, for some time, a Michigan-type night-discharge splint has been used to treat bruxism, continue to use it every night since its objective is to reposition the teeth and relax the muscles involved in the swallowing process
- Physiotherapy can also offer solutions that help the facial muscles regain their basic functions. In some cases, the specialist may recommend the use of specific drugs or dietary and postural measures

- Do not forget the possibility of psychological support and thus increase the resilience of individuals

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that the therapies applied to treat bruxism are aimed at reducing pain, preventing tooth wear and permanent damage to the jaw, and reducing teeth grinding.

Dental protectors and Michigan-style splints are often used to prevent bruxism while the patient sleeps. This method helps prevent tooth damage and temporomandibular joint problems, but it is not the only treatment itself.

However, although they are widely used, these devices do not solve the problem and, although they eliminate the pain, if they are stopped using it, it will reappear, and although the specific cause of bruxism is not clear, experts already recognize that it is something every day usually linked to stress, anxiety and sleep problems, the above are factors that exacerbate the problem.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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