

KEN GOLDSTEIN: Everyday Stress Can Lead to Tooth Loss

The common denominator that most of us share is stress. No matter where you go or what you do, stress seems to catch up to us, no matter what. So, we all have stress, but what we do with that stress sets some people apart from others. Some can harness that stress and turn it into something positive like working out or going for a run. However, most of us internalize that stress and seem to live with it. One of the manifestations of stress is clenching of the teeth. This is not to be confused with grinding, which is actually slight to moderate tooth wear which could result in sensitivity to hot/cold foods or drinks or even sweets. Clenching on the other hand, puts stress on the teeth or roots which could result in hairline fractures leading to more advanced fractures that could result in tooth loss. Some signs and symptoms of clenching include sore teeth, sore jaw, sensitive teeth, headaches and radiating pain to upper and lower jaws. A simple remedy for clenching is to not be so stressed out. That is easier said than done.

Most of the patients in my Endodontic practice in Marietta do not even realize they are clenching their teeth until we start talking about their stress levels. Then it hits them, "I may be clenching my teeth." I have a lot of patients who clench their teeth while they are sleeping and they end up with sore teeth or jaws in the morning and sometimes it may wake them up at night with pain. Then there are the subconscious clencher during the day that are not aware of what they are doing. So we have people clenching during the day and night subjecting their teeth or roots to forces that can actually fracture a tooth. I roughly see about 3-5 fractured teeth a week in my practice and it is difficult to tell a patient their tooth is fractured and they will need to extract or remove the tooth. This can become upsetting and expensive for most patients. So what is the fix?

I have put many patients in nightguards that can protect the teeth from contact and allow the jaw to rest at the same time. There are many different types of guards that people have a choice of. Some guards can be purchased over the counter at the

pharmacy or for a better fitting guard, your dentist can take an impression and send it out to a lab or do in house and fabricate a night guard appliance that is comfortable to wear overnight and I have some patients wearing theirs as much as possible except when they are eating or at work. Protecting your teeth from contacting each other will prevent the actual trauma that can cause tooth/root fractures that can lead to tooth loss. If you believe you could be clenching your teeth and are concerned about a fracture, please contact your dentist. For patients that are concerned, my practice has 3D imaging radiography that can detect fractures and vertical bone loss around the tooth that could suggest a fracture which regular xrays(radiographs) usually cannot detect.

We all have stress, but what you do with that stress could help save a perfectly good tooth from being extracted or removed.

Dr. Ken Goldstein has been in private practice in Marietta for 27 years. He is the founder of Marietta Endodontics and can be reached at g_ken@bellsouth.net.