

## Oral Wellness Newsletter

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### Sleep apnea in kids

Does your little one snore at night? Toss and turn restlessly – even wet the bed long after potty training is over? Your child may suffer from obstructive sleep apnea, a condition that can affect kids as young as three years old.<sup>1</sup>

Doctors call it “obstructive” sleep apnea because the airway actually becomes blocked – or obstructed. So your child’s breathing starts and stops abruptly, causing them to stir many times during the night. If your youngster consistently wakes up tired and cranky from lack of sleep, check for other signs of sleep apnea.

#### Common symptoms<sup>1</sup>

Snoring isn’t always the main symptom as with adults. Other warning signs may include:

- Mouth breathing
- Sleep walking or night terrors
- Morning headaches
- Learning problems
- Hyperactivity

- Nasal voice
- Need for naps past the age of napping

### What causes it?₂

Sleep apnea in kids is most commonly caused by enlarged tonsils and adenoids, which are glands located in the throat. Being overweight can also constrict the airway, as can some medical conditions like Down syndrome or cerebral palsy. Sleep apnea can also result from dental problems, such as having a small jaw or overbite, which may be treated with a device called an expander.

If you suspect your child may have sleep apnea, talk to your pediatrician. If it's due to an oral issue, the doctor will likely refer you to a dentist or orthodontist for treatment.

### [Read about expanders](#)



## Braces 101

Every parent loves their child's smile. Though cute as a button, your kid could still technically have a "bad bite".

Sometimes teeth can look straight, but the upper and lower jaws don't meet correctly. Teeth can also be crowded if the jaw bones are too small, or they may be coming in crooked. Thumbsucking, facial injuries and heredity can also be the cause of abnormal bites.

In a normal bite, the upper teeth fit slightly over the lower ones, and the points of molars sit snugly in the grooves of opposing molars³. If an abnormal bite isn't addressed with proper orthodontic treatment, your child could experience cavities, affected speech, jaw problems and other oral health issues³.

Your dentist may recommend having an orthodontist evaluate your child's teeth. This specialist is specifically trained to diagnose and correct bad bites. Fixing crooked teeth often involves getting braces, but can also include expanders, head gear and retainers.

### Types of braces

**Traditional and self-ligating braces** – Stainless metal or ceramic brackets are attached to teeth. A wire is threaded through slots in the brackets and held in place by small rubber bands or clips.

**Clear aligners** – These are a series of clear trays, which are fitted over your teeth and move them slightly over time. They're mostly used for mild to moderate issues.

**Lingual braces** – They work just like traditional braces, except they're attached to the tongue side of your teeth – a good option if you don't want them to be visible.

[Get more info on braces](#)



## 5 Ways to fight food cravings

If you're feeling stressed or depressed (and who wouldn't be right now!), step away from the cheese doodles. Your urge to chow down on snacks laden with fat and sugar is likely "emotional eating", also called stress eating. It's when you reach for feel-good grub, just because you're feeling bad.

Turning to comfort foods tickles the pleasure sensors in your brain, kind of like hitting a humongous "happy" button. But too many high-calorie, low-nutrition foods can do a number on your waistline and your overall health.

Here are five ways to resist those tempting cravings when they hit.

**Gauge your hunger level.** If you just cleared the dinner table, you're probably having an emotional urge to eat. Take your mind off the feeling to let it subside – catch up on the latest gossip of the stars or reality show.

**Edit your grocery list.** Stay out of the cookie and candy aisles! Instead, stock up on healthy but yummy snacks like mixed nuts, Greek yogurt or hummus and carrots sticks.

**Work it off.** Physical activity releases endorphins, chemicals that trigger positive feelings. Take a lap around the block, walk on the treadmill or pop in your favorite workout DVD.

**Fill up on H2O.** Water takes up space in your tummy, so it acts as a natural appetite suppressant. Up the flavor factor by infusing a pitcher with your own custom combo of berries, herbs and even cucumber slices.

**Don't feel guilty.** United Concordia Oral Wellness Consultant Dan Tison says, "It's okay to eat the comfort foods we crave during emotional times. Just make sure not to overdo it and enjoy in moderation."

[Infuse a batch of water](#)



## Heart disease and your oral health

Though gum disease doesn't cause heart disease and vice versa, they're thought to be linked. Serious gum disease appears to make blood pressure worse and can interfere with hypertension treatment.<sup>4</sup>

Mild gum disease, or gingivitis, is a common condition where the bacteria in plaque cause swelling, redness and bleeding. By practicing good oral care at home, you can help prevent plaque from building up.

The first signs of gingivitis are usually bleeding with brushing and flossing. If you have gingivitis, your dentist can help you reverse it with early treatment.

But if you ignore it, gingivitis can progress to periodontitis, a serious infection that can destroy the tissue and bone that hold your teeth in place. The infection may also get into your bloodstream and travel through your whole body – including your heart.<sup>5</sup>

Some United Concordia plans include extra coverage to make it more affordable to get the gum disease treatment you need. Our Smile for Health® - Wellness program provides additional periodontal services for people with heart disease and other medical conditions. Find out if you're eligible through your dental plan.

[Check for Smile for Health – Wellness coverage](#)



## Grind less, sleep more

Grinding your teeth – also called bruxism – is when you clench your teeth tightly during the day, or at night when you're asleep. Nearly 70% of bruxism cases are caused by stress or anxiety.<sup>6</sup>

## How does grinding damage teeth?

The forces involved with grinding can chip or break teeth, and even lead to loose teeth.<sup>7</sup> Grinding can also wear down the tooth enamel, giving affected teeth a flattened appearance. Worn-down teeth may also become sensitive.

## What other problems can occur?

This condition doesn't just damage your teeth – it can affect your overall health. You may have aching pain in your jaw and facial muscles, earaches or even headaches.

Clenching can also affect your normal sleep routine, and sleep deprivation can have a major effect on your mood. You may become irritable, short-tempered and more stressed than ever.

## How is it treated?

Dentists can create a custom-fitted mouthguard to protect the teeth from damage. Mouthguards aren't an all-out cure for clenching and grinding, but they can help prevent cracked and broken teeth. Dealing with the root cause of the problem – stress – is also critical.

[Find out more about bruxism](#)

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[1] [Obstructive Sleep Apnea in Children](#); cedars-sinai.org; 2021

[2] [Children and Sleep Apnea](#); sleepfoundation.org; 2021

[3] [Malocclusion of teeth](#); medlineplus.gov; 2021

[4] [Dental health and heart health](#); America Heart Association; December 2013

[5] [Gum disease and the connection to heart disease](#); health.harvard.edu; April 2018

[6] [Causes of Bruxism](#); bruxism.org.uk; 2020

[7] [Bruxism \(teeth grinding\)](#); mayoclinic.org; 2021

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