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Middle-aged teeth and stress

The link between your teeth and stress is more damaging than you think

By: Anna Sharratt



Sharon Oosthoek was enjoying a long-anticipated [vacation on a sailboat](http://www.more.ca/travel-and-adventure/adventures/sailing-around-the-world/a/21551) (<http://www.more.ca/travel-and-adventure/adventures/sailing-around-the-world/a/21551>) in the British Virgin Islands when she realized that she hadn't quite left the day-to-day grind behind.

"I was flossing my teeth and a chunk of one of my molars came off," says the 44-year-old Toronto writer and mom of two. Although the trip was a hit and the damaged tooth didn't bother her too much, the news at the dentist was a wake-up call.

After rebuilding her tooth, the dentist suggested putting on a crown. Oosthoek was already aware she was wearing down her molars through grinding and clenching. Now her teeth were showing stress marks - possible harbingers of extensive dental work in the not-too-distant future.

Oosthoek could be a poster child for our demographic. Fast-paced careers, [6 a.m. soccer practices](http://www.more.ca/body-and-mind/fitness/stay-fit-for-favourite-sports/a/22194) (<http://www.more.ca/body-and-mind/fitness/stay-fit-for-favourite-sports/a/22194>) and recessionary woes are turning many women into grinding, clenching stress balls of broken teeth and sore jaws. And those abused teeth are leading to expensive, time-consuming procedures including veneers, crowns, root canals, implants and - in extreme cases - complete mouth restorations.

"More often over the past 10 years, bruxism [grinding and clenching] is playing a bigger role in damage to teeth," says Don Friedlander, president of the Canadian Dental Association in Ottawa.

We all know to brush and floss, yet "bruxism is one of the top three causes of tooth loss," adds Charles Botbol, a cosmetic and general practice dentist in Toronto. "Stress is an aggravator - it makes things worse."

[And we're an anxious bunch](http://www.more.ca/attitude/reviews/review-a-brief-history-of-anxiety-by-patricia-pearson/a/20463) (<http://www.more.ca/attitude/reviews/review-a-brief-history-of-anxiety-by-patricia-pearson/a/20463>) . A recent StatsCan survey found women are consistently more likely than men to report their days as "quite a bit" or "extremely" stressful, with those 35 to 54 the most frazzled of all age groups studied.

Pearly doesn't mean healthy

Let's face it: Unless you're in the throes of a full-blown, mouth-throbbing emergency, the vast majority of women aren't thinking, I should be devoting more time to preventing bruxism. Even if they do take time out for dental care, women are more likely to spend it on cosmetic procedures such as whitening.

Just ask Botbol, who says the vast majority of female patients who come into his office opt just for whitening.

Next page: Why women are at greater risk for gingivitis

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