TESTING TIMES FOR TEENAGE TEETH

A recently published study indicates that teenagers who experience sleep problems are more susceptible to stress, which could contribute to academic, behavioural and health issues.

This is worrying news indeed, given that exam season is upon us and might therefore result in a vicious circle of stress-related bruxism both during the day-time and night-time, disturbed sleep patterns and everyday anxiety caused by the prospect of GCSEs, A levels and finals.

Immediate, short-term and reversible presentations might include sensitivity and/or tenderness of specific teeth as well as temporomandibular joint or related muscular discomfort. Management should be directed toward immediate relief of symptoms and this is one scenario where a soft biteguard can be extremely helpful.

Should such bruxism continue in the longer term, however, the following rather more substantial signs and symptoms might present with action being required:

- Sensitive teeth due to exposed dentine
- Discolouration, including yellowing and loss of shine due to loss of enamel
- Sharp or chipped anterior teeth
- Occlusal surfaces wearing flat and taking on a shiny, pitted appearance
- Altered occlusion as vertical height changes
- Abfraction lesions developing cervically

For the management of any signs or symptoms associated with longer term bruxism, and in addition to any specific treatment that may be required for the teeth themselves, a three-step treatment plan may be most appropriate:

1. Prescription of muscle relaxants
2. Treatment with a physiotherapist or osteopath with specialist knowledge of the temporomandibular joint and related muscles
3. Nightly use of a Michigan Splint.

It may also be a good idea to ensure patients are brushing effectively yet gently with a relatively soft toothbrush and a toothpaste that is low in abrasivity, as well as suggesting they do something relaxing before bed such as yoga, reading or having a bath.

The London Tooth Wear Centre® offers an evidence-based and comprehensive approach to managing tooth wear.