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Awake and sleep bruxism – new definitions and diagnostic criteria

Bruxism is a hot topic in dentistry and many other medical fields, and is an argument of discussion that led to recent consensus efforts to provide an updated definition for widespread use. Over recent years, the bruxism construct has been broadened to encompass a wide spectrum of jaw-muscle activities (i.e., both short-term/phasic and long-lasting/tonic) performed during sleep or wakefulness. In addition to that, since sleep and awake bruxism are generally considered as different behaviors observed during sleep and wakefulness, respectively, the single definition for bruxism has been replaced by two separate definitions:

- Sleep bruxism is a masticatory muscle activity during sleep that is characterized as rhythmic (phasic) or non-rhythmic (tonic) and is not a movement disorder or a sleep disorder in otherwise healthy individuals.
- Awake bruxism is a masticatory muscle activity during wakefulness that is characterized by repetitive or sustained tooth contact and/or by bracing or thrusting of the mandible and is not a movement disorder in otherwise healthy individuals.

In the attempt to provide a framework for the diagnostic validity of different approaches, a diagnostic grading has also been proposed by a consensus expert panel in 2013 and then refined in 2018. The authors of the consensus pointed out that this grading system was only a proposal, and could even be at odds with the difficulties associated with the application of cut-off points for assessing SB and AB. In particular, it is recommended that over the next few years the general diagnostic grading template that was introduced by the recent consensus papers is adapted and refined.

To that purpose, a multidimensional evaluation system providing both an assessment of bruxism status and the presence of etiological, comorbid, risk, and associated factors and conditions might be the best approach to evaluate bruxism patients with a comprehensive look at the clinical impact of the different bruxism activities and etiologies. The ultimate goal of such multidimensional system might be to facilitate the refinement of decision-making algorithms in the clinical setting.