

DOVER - People have a lot to grind their teeth about today.

Record job losses. Skyrocketing health insurance. Bonuses for bailed-out banking executives.

But all that gnawing and gnashing isn't so good for your teeth, and one area periodontist believes the economic recession is partly to blame for another type of recession â€” in his patients' gums.

Dr. Nomith Ramdev, who runs a dental practice on Silver Street, said as the economy has worsened, he has seen a noticeable increase in the number of patients showing effects from teeth grinding, which can lead to gum recession, as well as tooth sensitivity, migraines, jaw pain, tooth fractures, and gum disease.

Teeth grinding is caused by stress, and Ramdev believes the economic meltdown is one source of it in his patients.



"When I ask patients if they've been under stress, universally the answer has been yes," Ramdev said at his office Thursday. "Patients have said they're losing their job, or they're going to lose their job."

So far this year, Ramdev has fashioned anti-grinding nightguards for 12 patients â€” the same amount from all of 2008 and quadruple the amount from 2007.

"It seems that all of a sudden, in the last few months, we've been doing a couple a week," he said.

Teeth grinding â€” referred to as "bruxism" in the dental field â€” is common occurrence that can occur at any age and at irregular intervals, according to the American Dental Association. Causes include stress, difficulty sleeping, an abnormal bite, and crooked or missing teeth.

Most people grind at night, Ramdev said, but some do it during the day as well. "A lot of people don't even know their doing it," he said. "People have to catch themselves."

Ramdev acknowledged different people suffer from different sources of stress, and the economy may not be all to blame for the increase he has seen.

Area dentists report varying trends in grinding among patients.

Dr. Rich Rosato, a Concord-based oral surgeon, said he has not seen a significant increase of grinding complaints; while Dr. Pamela Baldassarre, a Bedford-based periodontist, said she has seen an uptick in recent months, citing stress as a factor.

Dr. Earle Simpson, also of Bedford, said he usually sees an increase in grinding during December and January, which he attributes to holiday stress. But with spring's arrival, he said there has been a decrease.

"I am seeing more ghost-like facial expressions when I discuss comprehensive treatment plans due to everyone's financial state," said Simpson, who also serves as president of the New Hampshire Dental Society.

Indeed, there are indications the economy has forced some to cut back on dental care.

In the fourth quarter of 2008, more dentists across the country reported decreased incomes and gross billings over the previous quarter of the same year, according to a recent study by the American Dental Association.

The study found 58.1 percent of dentists reported decreased incomes in the fourth quarter of 2008, up from 53 percent in the third quarter. It also found that 50.1 percent of dentists reported a decrease in gross billings in the fourth quarter, up from 46.5 percent in the third quarter.

"There has been some indication that people are delaying treatments or cosmetic (procedures) they would like to do. They are putting those off until the economy gets better," said Jim Williamson, executive director of the state dental society, which represents 750 registered dentists.

Ramdev, the Dover periodontist, said he has seen similar effects in patients who need nightguards, but elect not to get them for a variety of reasons, such as an inability to pay.