

What if there was a way to relieve some of our daily aches and pains. Are you one of the many who suffer daily headaches, neck and shoulder pain, or jaw and face pain? Do you clench or grind your teeth resulting in sensitive or broken teeth? If so, you may be suffering from what is often referred to as 'TMJ' or 'TMJ problems' or, more accurately, 'TMD'.

TMJ is an abbreviation for temporomandibular joint which is anatomical structure that we all have. It is a joint, much like our knees, shoulders and elbows. But unlike other joints in our body, our TMJs are affected by a hard component, namely, our teeth. Problems with the quality, arrangement or fit of our teeth have a direct effect on our TMJs. This is a possible source of the symptoms mentioned above. If you suffer from these types of symptoms you may be actually suffering from 'TMD'.

What is TMD?

Temporomandibular disorder or 'TMD' refers to the numerous painful symptoms one may experience due to dental malocclusion or a 'bad bite'. Common symptoms of TMD include headaches, jaw pain, facial pain, neck pain, sensitive teeth and loose teeth. Many of my new patients report having up to three headaches per week. The over the counter pain medicine business is booming! Often TMD patients report that they find themselves clenching or grinding their teeth excessively. Additionally, the teeth may have evidence of this grinding such as unusual wear patterns, fractures and even looseness. All of these are signs that one may have a bad bite or possibly a TMD problem.

What is a bad bite?

A 'bad bite' is an arrangement of the teeth that causes stress in the muscles that control the mandible (lower jaw). There are many potential causes of bite problems, some of which may begin as early as infancy. Finger or thumb sucking, if left unchecked may become a powerful habit that can effect the early development of the jaws and the arrangement of the teeth as they erupt into place. If possible it is best to stop this habit before it becomes too difficult to change.

Artificial feeding is another potential cause of bite problems. Human babies are designed to digest human milk. Human milk has antibodies that protect the baby from upper respiratory infections. The natural sucking motion when a baby is breastfeeding helps to develop a proper shape of the jaws. Artificially fed babies have a greater incidence of allergy problems. Cow's milk allergy may be the most common allergy in infancy. Upper respiratory allergies cause swelling of the nasal passages resulting in mouth breathing. Mouth breathing in an infant will affect the shape of the developing jaws and may result in a future bite problem.

Trauma to the TMJs may result in a future bite problem. Falls or blows to the jaw are potential causes of this trauma. Proper mouth guards are a must for contact sports.

As you can see, there are numerous sources of a bad bite, so it is no surprise that so many of us suffer from the ill effects of bite problems or 'TMD'.

Why does it cause headaches?

The muscles of the temple area of the forehead are muscles that play a key role in the positioning and in the closing of the jaw. When the mandible (lower jaw) rests in its most comfortable position, closes on the correct path and closes into an ideal bite, these muscles are happy. At rest they can effectively eliminate toxic waste products and refresh themselves with oxygen. Clean, well rested muscles work more efficiently. On the other hand, toxic tired muscles cause pain. Pain in these muscles in your head may result in a headache. Left unchecked, this pain may spread to your face, the top of your head, the back of your neck and into your shoulders.

How is TMD treated?

If the indications are that your bite is a major factor in your pain your dentist may recommend a TMD treatment plan. This involves careful measurement of the bite pattern and making a custom fitting bite repositioning device or 'orthotic'. Nothing is done to permanently alter your teeth. After having worn the appliance for some time, both you and your dentist will know for sure if this new bite position has resolved your TMD problem. If so, there are several options available for long term treatment including permanent dental treatment or possibly orthodontics. The good news is that head and neck pain caused by a bad bite can be readily identified and quickly resolved.

There is no reason to continue to suffer. TMD is a manageable dysfunction. Call the office of Dr. Todd Fruit 897-5788 today to learn more about how we can help manage your TMD.