

The Jaw: Take a Bite out of Stress

An estimated 10 million Americans suffer from Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction (TMD). Potentially another 10 million have hidden cases of TMD producing or aggravating their headaches or neck and shoulder pain. Sinus, ear, face and eye pain are commonly associated with TMD and often misdiagnosed because the referred pain from the jaw joint or muscles was never considered. Furthermore, if you have been involved in a car accident or other head and neck injury, you probably have some degree of TMD.

Jaw pain often stems from the muscles or the TM joint. Popping, clicking, pain, locking or grinding noises with chewing and movement of the jaw means you have TMD.

Many people clench and grind at night and wake with jaw soreness in the morning. To prevent grinding or clenching during the day, remind yourself to keep the, “Lips together and teeth apart.”

When you have tenderness at the jaw joint use 5 minutes of ice before bed and a few other times during the day. With muscle tenderness use 5 or 10 minutes of ice or heat (whichever feels best).

The herbs valerian, hops, and passionflower, and supplementing with calcium, magnesium and B-complex are helpful to calm you and your muscles. Sleep on your back, since sleeping on your side or stomach puts pressure on your jaw and pushes it to the side.

Avoid chewing gum, eating chewy meats and foods that are hard and crunchy like nuts and raw vegetables. Take small bites and avoid wide mouth opening with foods like sandwiches and hamburgers.

In my years of treating people with TMD, I find that a combination of muscle, massage and joint therapies in conjunction with home remedies and stress reduction techniques is most effective. If you have chronic head, neck, shoulder or face pain that isn't responding to treatment, consider a TMJ evaluation to see if TMD may be causing or worsening the symptoms.

Yours in health,

Dr. Rick

Dr. Rick Schlüssel is a Chiropractor and Applied Kinesiologist providing preventive health care, treatment for pain and injuries, holistic health assessments and a variety of natural therapies. He can be reached at The Healing Place at 530-889-0388 or by email at rick@mydrnick.com