

I have no jaw pain or TMJ popping, so how can I have a TMJ disorder?

FOR YOUR HEALTH



by
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Most patients, and even many doctors, are not aware of how a misaligned or unstable bite can adversely affect the head and neck. The muscular tension from a poor jaw posture can cause many symptoms including headaches, migraines, neck pain, and even many ear symptoms like tinnitus or vertigo. Unfortunately, these people who are suffering often never identify the root cause of these symptoms because of the lack of understanding of this connection in the medical and dental fields. It is widely misunderstood what symptoms fall under a temporomandibular joint disorder. Because the word "joint" is involved in this heading, most patients, physicians, and even dentists believe that clicking, popping, or pain in the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) needs to be present if a person is considered a "TMJ" patient. This can be true of many patients, but does not to be the case for a patient to have a TMJ disorder. They seek help from their primary care physician or ENT physician, or they find a chiropractor for the hope of relief, when in reality, they are suffering from an undiagnosed TMJ disorder.

Defining a "TMJ Disorder"

The majority of TMJ patients that I treat have no noise in their joints, no actual discomfort in their jaws, and have an extremely healthy dentition. Unfortunately, they are suffering daily with migraines and muscular tension headaches, ear congestion and pain, upper neck pain and discomfort, and ringing in the ears or vertigo. Just because you are not experiencing any jaw pain or discomfort, does not mean that a jaw issue isn't causing other symptoms. Therefore, I have been trying to describe these patients without using the word "TMJ disorder"

and more appropriately, "Craniofacial Pain" patients.

Common Symptoms of a TMJ disorder (Craniofacial Pain Disorder)

- Headaches
- Ear pain
- Migraines
- Jaw pain (with or without joint sounds)
- Neck pain
- Subjective hearing loss
- Ear congestion or blockage
- Tinnitus (ear ringing)
- Vertigo (Dizziness)
- Sinus Pressure or pain
- Snoring or sleep apnea
- Insomnia

How do we identify these patients?

There are 3 things that determine your bite: Your teeth, your facial muscles, and your temporomandibular joints. The teeth dominate the system, so wherever your teeth are, your TMJs and facial muscles must accommodate. Unfortunately, many times they must accommodate at a price which is a poor jaw position and muscular tension and pain. But just because your jaw is in an uncomfortable position, you may not have any clicks, pops, or pain in your joints and still be experiencing muscular issues in the head and neck. It is an accepted fact in dentistry that 90% of all TMJ symptoms are muscular in origin. Therefore, we must take this facial musculature into consideration when treating these TMJ patients, regardless of any joint clicking or popping.

Determining the proper jaw position, where do you begin?

Muscles of the face and neck are programmed to control head and lower jaw posture in a way that accommodates a person's bite, even if that bite is less than ideal. Therefore,

deprogramming muscle memory, increasing blood flow to these muscles, and restoring muscle health is essential in determining a proper jaw posture. With computerized technology and muscle relaxation we make an appliance (called an orthotic) that easily fits over your lower teeth. It is very comfortable and barely noticeable in the mouth, but provides proper support for a person's jaw relieving the muscular tension and discomfort they have been experiencing.

Relieving your Symptoms...

This orthotic therapy continues for 4-6 months with several adjustments utilizing muscle relaxation, computerized jaw tracking and muscular monitoring. Most patients start feeling relief within the first 2-4 weeks. After resolution of symptoms to the patient's satisfaction, and verification of stability on the computer, the patient has completed the therapeutic phase of treatment. The patient is then given the opportunity to either continue with an orthotic, but on a limited basis, or move on to a permanent orthodontic or a restorative change in their bite. There are many people who are suffering with daily symptoms of head and neck pain and they have no idea that it is being caused by a misaligned bite. Luckily, we have ways to identify if this is the origin of their symptoms, and if it is a TMJ disorder, can get people back to living life without pain.

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