



Not Tonight, Honey— I Have a Headache!

— by Ron Boshier D.D.S., F.A.G.D.

P EOPLE WHO SUFFER FROM chronic headaches often go from doctor to doctor trying to find solutions to their head pain, but only get another prescription that treats the symptoms and not the problem. Most people do not know what options there are to treat their pain, or what is actually available for them. Chronic migraine, headache and facial pain can range from being occasionally distracting to totally debilitating. Those whose symptoms are mild and infrequent may not question the source. Others, who've lived with the ongoing battle, may wonder if they'll ever find long-term relief.

Many don't ask this soon enough but the question is, "Could it be a dental problem?" It just might be. A large number of cases involving headaches, muscles spasms and jaw joint pain are absolutely a dental problem. The medical and dental professions are becoming aware of the intricate relationship between proper bite and the muscles and nerves of the jaw joint. A very delicate and predictable, reproducible balance must occur in the chewing system for total harmony, stability and comfort.

Let me explain. If you had one leg that became shorter than the other, how long would it take before it would affect your hips? Well, it depends: if you're bedridden—never; if you're a jogger—pretty soon; and if you're a marathon runner—immediately and severely. If your bite is not balanced or even, it is like having a shorter leg and sooner or later it is going to start hurting. And if you have a tendency to clench and grind your teeth, especially while asleep, you are a dental marathon runner.

For a large number of patients with facial pain and headaches, the problem and its solution revolve around one of the most complex joints in the body—the Temporomandibular Joint (TM Joint). The condition is generally referred to as Temporomandibular Joint Syndrome, or TMJ. It is not a disease, but rather a simultaneous

occurrence of a number of problems associated with the jaw, nerves and chewing muscles. With today's new technologies and increased understanding, dentists with specific, advanced training in TMJ disorders can diagnose and successfully treat the large majority of these patients. In fact, if a TMJ disorder is determined, predictable long-term relief is achievable 95 percent of the time.

Most headache sufferers, after learning that there are benefits to proper treatment for TMJ-caused headaches, wonder, "How do I find a doctor trained in providing this care?" The best advice is to ask the dentist the following questions:

"Do you treat headaches that stem from TMJ?" Some dentists do not focus on specific conditions, like headaches, that stem from TMJ and would prefer not to.

"What is your experience and training?" Comprehensive treatment of TMJ can be complicated, so additional and advanced training is important. Many patients are lumped under the diagnosis of TMJ when in actuality they may not have the true symptoms of the syndrome. So it is critical to have a diagnosis from an expert in the field.

"Do you have a working relationship with an imaging center?" Not all patients need to have an MRI, but some do. The TM joint is complicated and the doctor needs a complete picture when treating a TMJ patient. The doctor is working in the dark if he or she can't order and interpret an MRI for TMJ syndrome when needed.

Ask for credentials or affiliations. Don't be shy. The stakes are too high. If the doctor is properly trained, he or she should be glad to present credentials and happy to do so.

No one has a clue what it's like to wake up every morning knowing that the majority of the day will be spent fighting a constant, agonizing, excruciating headache that just won't give up. Unless they are possibly fighting TMJ! But help is available. The headache can be eased and a "normal" life can be just around the corner with the right dental care professional. +

“Could it be a dental problem?”