



TMD or Temporomandibular Disorder

Some 60 million Americans suffer from TMD (commonly known as TMJ). Simply stated, TMD is a syndrome that occurs when the lower jaw is displaced in the joint space. This displacement of the lower jaw results in symptoms of various types.

Most Common TMD Symptoms:

- Frequent headaches, including migraines
- Frequent neck or back aches
- Ear or sinus “fullness”
- “Sinus infections”
- Tenderness/pain in the muscles of the face
- Tenderness around the eyes
- Clicking or popping in the joint
- Dizziness
- Pain around the joint
- Ringing in the ears
- Chronic fatigue
- Depression

What Causes TMD?

The displacement of the lower jaw results in impingement or pinching of nerves and arteries. These arteries carry blood to the brain and other vital structures of the head (ears, eyes, sinuses, etc.).

Decreasing the blood supply, as well as the oxygen supply, to these vital structures cause many of the common symptoms of TMJ. Pinching the nerves that innervate these same vital structures causes the other symptoms. The most common causes of jaw displacement are:

- Accidents
- Developmental (natural) defects, including the wearing down of teeth or fillings
- Missing back teeth
- Orthodontics, especially using headgear
- Misaligned or crowded teeth, especially front teeth

How is TMD Diagnosed?

TMD is diagnosed based on a patient's history of symptoms and an x-ray of the joint itself. X-rays will clearly show if there is impingement of the joint space and therefore pinching of vital nerves and arteries that occupy that space.

What can be done to Correct TMD?

The only way to permanently eliminate the symptoms of TMD is to reposition the lower jaw to eliminate the pinching of the nerves and arteries. This is done conservatively without surgery. It is accomplished in two phases.

Phase 1:

A custom fabricated splint is worn (generally on the lower teeth). The splint is made of acrylic and is very comfortable to wear. The splint is worn 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Especially while eating. The splint is worn for 3-9 months. Most symptoms of TMD will be eliminated virtually overnight. Headaches will usually go away within 24-48 hours.

Phase 2:

After allowing for adequate healing of the damaged muscles and tissue surrounding the joint a second phase of treatment is initiated. This final phase of treatment is a conservative treatment that allows the lower jaw to remain in its new "pain-free" location. This is normally accomplished through some form of orthodontic treatment and rarely includes any surgical procedure.

Please feel free to call our office with any questions you might have regarding this exciting treatment that literally changes people's lives.