WHAT DO YOU THINK?



Imagine going through life with persistent, unexplained pain and other complications in the head, face and body. According to the [National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR)](http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/), approximately 5-12% of the American population, or about 10 million Americans, suffer from a condition that can cause a whole host of physical discomforts, with the source of the problem arising from a seemingly insignificant location: the jaw joint.

[Temporomandibular joint disorder](http://www.drsofsmiles.com/tmd-symptoms.html), also called TMJ or TMD, is a very common musculoskeletal condition that occurs when the temporomandibular jaw joint becomes misaligned. TMJ symptoms can range from minor irritations to serious, life debilitating conditions.

One might think that a problem with a jaw joint would only affect a person’s mouth. In reality, the temporomandibular joint is positioned near the upper neck region. When the TMJ becomes imbalanced, the brain calls upon the nearby muscles to try to correct the problem. This is where the neck, back and shoulder pain and discomfort can stem from in relation to TMJ issues.

The ears can also be affected by a jaw joint misalignment because of the pressure placed on the tympanic bone as well as the surrounding nerves, [ligaments](http://www.articlesbase.com/dental-care-articles/how-does-jaw-alignment-affect-so-many-parts-of-the-head-face-and-body-1214545.html) and arteries.

Symptoms of TMJ

With the temporomandibular joint being such an integral part of a person’s jaw, any imbalance in this area can lead to a variety of mild to severe symptoms, including:

* Jaw or facial pain
* Jaw or muscle stiffness
* Difficulty eating or speaking
* Severe headaches or migraines
* Jaw popping or clicking
* Jaw locking
* [Difficulty hearing](http://www.articlesbase.com/dental-care-articles/how-does-jaw-alignment-affect-so-many-parts-of-the-head-face-and-body-1214545.html) or ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
* Ear infections
* Sinus pain
* Neck, back or shoulder pain
* Numb sensations in the extremities
* Teeth problems, such as broken, chipped or loose teeth
* Bad posture, leading to impeded oxygen flow to organs and ultimately fatigue

Causes of TMJ

There is no single cause of TMJ. This condition tends to be more common for women, so there may be a link between TMJ and female [hormones](http://www.articlesbase.com/dental-care-articles/how-does-jaw-alignment-affect-so-many-parts-of-the-head-face-and-body-1214545.html), but research is still being done on this topic. Some possible causes of TMJ could be:

* Stress
* Teeth grinding or clenching
* Trauma to the facial or head area
* Diseases, such as arthritis or Fibromyalgia
* Poor [dental care](http://www.articlesbase.com/dental-care-articles/how-does-jaw-alignment-affect-so-many-parts-of-the-head-face-and-body-1214545.html)
* Bad habits, such as nail biting or ice chewing

TMJ Treatments

People who suffer from TMJ must often try numerous treatment options before getting full relief from this condition. Some remedies include:

* Pain medications
* Stress reduction or other self-care techniques
* Wearing mouth guards
* BOTOX treatments
* Surgery

Even though TMJ is not technically a dental issue, many people find relief after visiting [neuromuscular dentists](http://www.drsofsmiles.com/neuromuscular-dentistry.html). Dentists specially trained in this area of expertise utilize a machine called a Transcutaneous Electrical Neural Stimulation (TENS) machine to relax the jaw muscles and determine the patient’s proper jaw alignment. Often a mouth appliance along with lifestyle changes will be recommended to help realign the jaw and correct the bite.

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**The Ill Effects of Chewing Gum**

Though it's hard to imagine, chewing gum is one of the oldest candies in the world! For thousands of years, people of all cultures have enjoyed chewing gum without realizing the dangers that can occur to their bodies, especially with gums containing artificial flavoring.

**\*History\***

Many years ago, archaeologists made a surprising discovery! It seems prehistoric men and women chewed on lumps of tree resin for pure enjoyment, making them the first-ever gum chewers in recorded history. The study of man has also found that almost every culture chomped "gum." Ancient Greeks routinely gnawed on tree resin to clean their teeth and freshen their breath, and called their treat "mastiche." Indians chewed on the sap from trees. The Maya Indians of Central America gummed chicle. Early settlers bit into hardened tree sap and beeswax.

Everyday, we can see people chewing gum, but why do people chew gum? So I decided to find out why and to perform an independent study on whether there are any benefits or dangers. After polling hundreds of people, the most common reason are the following; bad breathe prevention, stress release, weight management, increases concentration and even alertness. When I reviewed their answers, it was clear to me that people were trying to out smart Mother Nature... but at what cost?

**\*Dangers\***

Our bodies were never designed to be constantly chewing and there are significant neurological mechanisms in the chewing process. When you chew, your brain thinks it is going to get food and secretes digestive enzymes, such as Amylase in the mouth to break down carbohydrates. This is the first stage of digestion. It then signals the gastrointestinal track and pancreas to secrete more enzymes, such as Protease and Lipase in preparation for what it believes to be food coming down that needs to be digested. This is the normal process by which protein and fat are broken down. This unnatural process can cause bloating.

Hormone imbalances occur, due to our digestive system being controlled and regulated by our autonomic nervous system, such as insulin and cortisol being secreted. The stomach then starts producing Hydrochloric Acid. This can't be used and can create potential digestive dysfunction, such as Acid Reflux Ulcers and Bruxism (teeth grinding and clinching).

Biomechanical imbalances like forward head posture, which is a result of excessive chewing can strain the cervical vertebrae causing the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae to compensate, making one hip or shoulder lower than the other. TMJ can also occur as well as headaches and since most people chew on one side, asymmetry faces. Gums containing artificial flavoring and other toxic chemicals can lead to a long list of adverse consequences. \*The bottom line is, you shouldn't chew gum!\*