

## TMJ and Dental Health

“TMJ” is a popular term used to describe a disorder of the jaw joints, chewing muscles and bite. Symptoms masquerade as a multitude of other problems such as sinus headaches, migraines, neck and shoulder stiffness, earaches and tooth problems. These symptoms are caused by an instability in your jaw joint and can be successfully treated by a dentist who has specialized training in managing these disorders.

TMD (TMJ dysfunction) is the dental term describing a collection of symptoms, which result when the chewing muscles, bite and jaw joints do not work together correctly. TMJ stands for the temporomandibular joints. These are the two joints that connect your jaw to your skull. When these joints are not functioning as designed, they can cause many problems, such as:

- Clicking or popping noises
- Pain to opening or closing the jaw
- Locking or limited opening of your mouth

Muscle spasm goes hand-in-hand with displaced jaw joints. Because the nerves and muscles are so complex in this area, when these muscles are in spasm the problems can be far-reaching. People suffer from symptoms they would never think to associate with their bite, such as:

- Headaches
- Pain behind the eyes
- Dizziness
- Earaches, stuffiness or ringing of the ears
- Clenching or grinding of the teeth
- Worn, broken, loose and chipped teeth
- Neck, shoulder or back pain
- Numbness or tingling of the fingers

The primary problem can be in the joints themselves; the muscles of the face and jaw; the bite (how the teeth fit and work for chewing) or a combination of these. Because the symptoms masquerade as so many other conditions, many people travel from doctor to doctor in search of relief. It is estimated that as many as 10-15% of Americans suffer from one or more of these symptoms. Many never think to seek a dentist trained in TMD for help.

