

Headache and jaw problems

Problems with the teeth and jaw can contribute to headache and migraine. Dental abscesses, post-extraction infection and difficulties with the joint of the jaw can cause pain in the local area, as well as referred pain to the face and head. The jaw joint is called the temporo-mandibular joint. Problems with the jaw are grouped under the general term of temporo-mandibular joint dysfunction, or TMD.

Tooth abscess

Sometimes, the interior of a tooth, called the pulp, can become infected. If the infected tooth is located in the upper jaw, then aching of the face and head may result. The pain can be intense. The usual treatment for an abscess is endodontic treatment combined with a course of antibiotics. Gum infections and impacted wisdom teeth can also cause facial pain and headache, and require prompt dental treatment.

Post-extraction infection

When a tooth is removed from its socket, the bone can be exposed to potential infection. Any problems of this type tend to occur within two to 10 days after the dental extraction. The pain is usually localised to the extraction area, but sometimes the pain will radiate into the face, temple and neck. A follow-up consultation with your dentist is required, since the pain will worsen unless the socket is treated.

Temporo-mandibular joint dysfunction (TMD)

The joint of the jaw is called the temporo-mandibular joint. Problems with this joint are grouped under the general term of temporo-mandibular joint dysfunction, or TMD. The typical symptoms of any type of TMD include pain localised to the area or spreading to include aching of the face, neck and head, and sometimes unusual clicking or grinding noises when the jaw opens and closes. In severe cases, the jaw may lock in certain positions. Some examples of incidents that can bring on TMD related headaches include:

- **Bad habits** - including teeth grinding or clenching, lip or cheek biting.
- **Diseases** - such as rheumatoid arthritis that affects the jaw joint.
- **Joint structure** - internal problems within the joint, including the cartilage.
- **Misalignment of teeth** - when the teeth of the upper and lower jaw meet unevenly.
- **Muscle tension** - which includes using unnecessary muscular effort, such as while chewing.
- **Trauma** - such as whiplash from car accidents, falls or sports injuries.

Treating headaches caused by TMD

Since the headaches or migraines are triggered by an underlying problem with the jaw joint, professional advice is necessary. Dental professionals such as orthodontists and dentists are qualified to help with problems associated with the jaw and teeth.

Where to get help

- Your dentist
- Your doctor
- Orthodontist
- Other dental experts.

Things to remember

- Problems with the teeth and jaw can contribute to headache and migraine.
- Dental abscesses or infected tooth sockets can spread pain into the face and head, and require attention from a dental professional.
- Problems with the jaw joint, caused by trauma, disease or muscle tension, can lead to recurring headache if left untreated.

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