



Your Dental Health

“Take a Bite out of Headaches”

By Stephen Durham, DMD, FAGD

Who doesn't hate a headache? Most of us experience them occasionally, pop a few pills and go on about our business. For others, headaches can be an ongoing, severely debilitating condition that affects many aspects of our lives. Because so many people suffer from terrible headaches, they are one of the leading reasons people visit physicians every year. According to one source, headache disorders costs more than 31 billion in the US annually, including 9% labor lost productivity.

There are many causes of headaches or neck pain. Most people with severe headaches will see physicians and will be able to rule out whether eye strain or tumors, etc are the culprit. But most would never suspect that problems anywhere in the head and neck area could actually be the result of an improper bite.

What we as dentist call occlusion, is what most people refer to as ‘the bite’ - the way teeth come together. The bite muscles in the temporal area and side of the head are a very important part of chewing, closing and posturing the jaw. When the bite is in an improper position or unbalanced, it can lead to abnormal tension in the muscles of occlusion. This tension can lead to any number of problems, including, clenching, grinding, tooth wear, pain or headaches. If the bite is not placed in its proper position, the muscles remain tense for long periods of time. The contracted and tense muscles suffer from poor circulation due to lack of rest. The poor circulation causes reduced oxygen and waste product buildup, such as Lactic acid. The end result is pain!

New technology allows properly trained neuromuscular dentists to evaluate the state of the affected muscles and bite. Based on the evaluation results and other information obtained from a thorough dental exam, the possible cause of headaches or pain could be found to be a problem with the bite. Corrective treatment normally starts with a custom made orthotic to position the teeth, and muscles to a correct relationship. The orthotic can be a very conservative option

for getting the bite into that proper rest position. It can also be the starting point for changing the teeth to the resting position permanently by orthodontics or cosmetic dentistry.

Headaches are only one of the many signs and symptoms of an improper bite. Other areas to look for are a limited jaw/mouth opening and movement, ringing in ears, loose, sensitive, or worn teeth, jaw clenching, and teeth grinding. If you suspect that you have a bite that is not correctly positioned, it may be in your best interest to have a professional evaluation by a neuromuscular dentist in your area. ***Just remember, to take a bite out of headaches, the muscles must be happy!***

Dr. Stephen Durham offers a wide variety of dental services and has received post graduate training at the Las Vegas Institute for Cosmetic and Neuromuscular Dentistry. For more information call 379-5400 or visit www.durhamdental.net