



DON'T TAKE ASPIRIN FOR THAT HEADACHE- SEE YOUR DENTIST.



By: Steven D. Spitz, DMD

When sitting down with patients during their initial consultation, many individuals mention that headaches interrupt their lives. Although they tell me that they absolutely do not grind their teeth, most of the time the wear patterns on their teeth do show that grinding is a factor. Tooth grinding usually occurs at night or under stress, and **through the use of occlusal guards, 90% of patients are relieved of their headache symptoms.**

"It took me a little while to get used to my jaw being pulled forward [with the mouthguard], and I found that I experienced less pain during the day. I am actually feeling rested after 8 hours of sleep."

~Jennifer J., patient since 2001

According to the American Academy of Craniofacial Pain (AACP), **one in eight Americans suffers from headaches so severe that their everyday life is affected.** In fact, headaches are the number-one pain problem in the U.S. And, while many people may suspect that their headaches are being caused by muscle tension, they should consider that this tension could actually be a result of dental stress-

es; grinding and clenching and even snoring and sleep apnea.

The muscles that control the jaw are very complex, and are constantly at work. A task as simple as swallowing becomes a constant stress for jaw muscles when teeth are out of alignment. Headaches can be difficult to diagnose because the symptoms are often felt in different areas than where the pain actually originated.

According to the AACP, the following 'headache' symptoms have been attributed to, and in many cases may actually be a result of dental issues:

- Pain behind the eyes
- Sore jaw muscles or "tired" muscles upon awakening
- Teeth grinding
- Clicking or popping jaw joints
- Head and/or scalp painful to the touch

The jaw, also known as the temporomandibular joint, is the only joint in the human body to move in three dimensions. Many types of head, neck or facial pain are due to a dysfunction of the temporomandibular joint, commonly referred to as TMJ.

To solve the problem, the joint dysfunction must be addressed. This can be accomplished in a number of ways. A long-term solution and the recommended solution in most cases, is to have the teeth reshaped, or in some cases rebuilt, by a dentist. However, oral appliances or *occlusal guards* are often used to align the jaw and relieve

pain. This is a clear removable appliance that is worn at night. Although this does take a little getting used to, about a week, the **results are dramatic.** In some cases, depending on the severity of the headaches and stress, occlusal guards may be suggested to be worn during the day as well. Another type of appliance is a fixed splint that is attached to the teeth. This is a semi-permanent solution that is placed and is easily removed by your dentist. In severe cases, surgery may be necessary to move the teeth into proper position.

Aside of headaches, **a misaligned bite can also be a cause for losing otherwise healthy teeth.** For the most part, there are three reasons why individuals lose their teeth; Periodontal disease (also known as gum disease), and cavities are usually attributed to the cause. The third reason is *occlusion*, or how the teeth come together. As you are reading this, notice how your teeth come together. If your teeth are touching even when you are relaxing, you may be experiencing "traumatic dental occlusion".

"Thank you for recommending and preparing a night time bite plate for me. This bite plate has really made the difference [and] I find I sleep more comfortably."

~Andrew C., patient since 1997

This is important when understanding the force generated in the teeth and the jaw joints. **As you bite on food or on the teeth themselves, the average force is anywhere from 56-300 pounds per square inch,** but can be as much as 987 pounds per square inch- the strongest reported bite force on record. This is a lot of force concentrated in a very small area. Trauma to the occlusion can develop in many ways. Breaking a tooth or having a restoration placed even a little high can throw the bite out of alignment. Picture a full set of teeth like books on a bookshelf. When one is removed or shifted, the rest fall over or move, filling in the space. This shifting of the teeth will ultimately cause one tooth to consistently hit first when biting, and subsequently cause trauma to that tooth or the bone surrounding it. With this in mind, if headaches or sleeping are a serious concern, a consultation with a dentist could offer help. Instead of turning to medications for temporary relief, discuss your goals with your dentist for a pain-free future.

For more information or to schedule a consultation please contact Dr. Spitz at 617-437-1060.



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Publisher's Note

I recently had some work done on my teeth by Dr. Spitz, and nobody has ever gone to such efforts to make me feel as comfortable and relaxed. He genuinely cared about my entire well-being rather than simply going through the motions to get me out of the chair as quickly as possible. If you are as nervous as I am about seeing the dentist, I highly recommend seeing Dr. Spitz for your next appointment.

Steven D. Spitz, DMD is founder and principal of Smileboston™ Cosmetic and Implant Dentistry; a Boston-based dental office concentrating in full-mouth dental care. Dr. Spitz is the only prosthodontist in New England treating patients with the Waterlase® MD, utilizing dental lasers for treatment, dental implant placement, tooth restoration and full mouth rehabilitation. He lectures nationally and internationally on the advanced applications of lasers and implant dentistry, and has been honored as Best Cosmetic Dentist by the Improper Bostonian and mentioned as, "One of the most reputable places in Boston for cosmetic procedures" by Boston Magazine. Dr. Spitz, who treats all facets of dentistry, welcomes your questions.

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