



Oh My Aching Jaw!

It's the best time of year in Huntington Beach. All of the tourists are gone and you can get a crunchy, fresh apple at the Farmer's Market. Or maybe enjoy a thick steak at one of the downtown restaurants while watching the sunset at the pier. Sounds good, unless you are experiencing jaw pain, inability to take big bites, or pain with chewing. Maybe you experience headaches, facial, neck pain, or ear stiffness. Any of these symptoms could be caused by a problem commonly referred to as "TMJ" or cranial facial pain.

TMJ (Temporal mandibular joint dysfunction) is a condition that affects the joints just in front of the ears. Although the joints themselves can be the source of cranial facial pain, often it is the soft tissue and surrounding muscles which are the culprit.

Muscles surrounding the TM joint are highly susceptible to physical and/or emotional stress. When affected, these muscles can develop trigger points, or areas of local tenderness, which then makes it more difficult to talk or chew. When trigger points occur in these facial muscles, they frequently cause pain to radiate out to the teeth, ears, eyes and throughout the whole facial region.

The TMJ soft tissue can be categorized into muscles that open, rotate, close or clench or jaw, and muscles that stabilize the area. It is important to develop balance between the cranio-facial and cranial/cervical complex to prevent hyper-activity and irritation to this area.

Joint noises such as clicks, pops, or grinding, can often be annoying, but many times, they are not the source of cranial facial pain.

So, how does someone get rid of these symptoms? It is highly recommended that you seek a consultation with your doctor or dentist. Along with this, you should avoid aggressive chewing (like that crunchy apple or steak), and perform local application of ice or heat. You can also work to improve your general posture, which helps to decrease clenching and decreases additional stress in this area.



Sometimes these interventions are not enough and a more comprehensive approach must be pursued, such as a referral to a Cranio-Facial Physical Therapist who can instruct you in self-management techniques that are helpful from the first day, and get you back to eating normally in one to two months. Just in time to eat those caramels on the Christmas candy tray. **HB**

Alan Vogel, PT, OCS, CEAS is owner of CRST whose staff consists of physical therapists with doctoral degrees, who are board-certified orthopedic clinical specialists, as well as physical therapy assistants, athletic trainers and certified strength and conditioning specialists. Also on staff at CRHB are therapists who are specially trained and very experienced in the treatment of TMJ dysfunction. California Rehabilitation and Sports Therapy is located at 5772 Bolsa Ave., Suite 101, in HB and can be reached at (714) 897-3589 or online at www.calrehab.com