

# 'My jaw is a real pain in the neck ... literally'

Did you know that approximately 80 percent of all people who have pain in their head have lost some of the normal curve of the upper spine in the neck area? These people may experience daily headaches, neck pain, vertigo (dizziness), and even ringing in the ears



Dentally Speaking  
by  
Jeffrey S.  
Haddad D.D.S.

which are all common symptoms of a temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorder. Most people would never suspect that the neck and jaw would be related, including many physicians and dentists, but they can directly affect each other causing discomfort or pain if they are out of balance. The latest

research is showing that a bad neck position and poor posture can be one of the main causes of a TMJ disorder, and unless it is properly addressed, patients will continue to suffer from the above-mentioned symptoms.

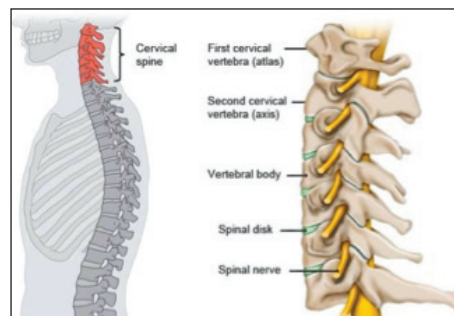
If you are someone who

relieved.

Think of it like someone who breaks a toe and is forced to walk in a non-ideal way - the rest of the body will compensate but eventually that person may start to have pain in their knee, or the other leg because they are accommodating for the change. Even though the other leg is hurting, the cause is actually the toe on the other side of the body.

Therefore, if a person has compression in their upper cervical spine resulting in misalignment, this

will also force them into an uncomfortable and misaligned jaw position. Vice versa.



has either neck pain or jaw pain, or possibly both, it can be a "chicken or the egg" situation meaning which came first, the poor posture or the bad bite and jaw position. In most cases, it doesn't matter because once symptoms start to occur, both the neck and the jaw are affected and need to be taken into consideration to give the patients relief.

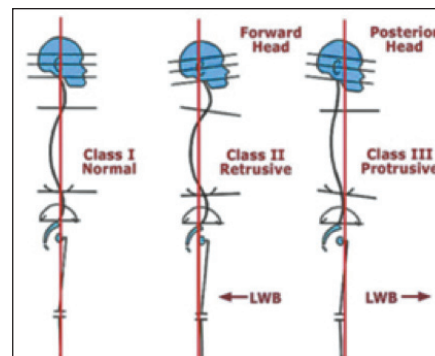
Recently, I had the pleasure of studying with world-renowned physical therapist Dr. Mariano Rocobado, who is one of the leading experts in treating TMJ disorders. He demonstrated a direct relationship between the upper cervical spine and a bad jaw position. The body as a whole operates on the principle of compensation, so when the body's capacity to compensate for pathological changes is pushed too far, symptoms will often start appearing. Each individual has a unique compensation limit beyond which such symptoms are triggered. If a patient has a compromised bite due to older dental work, clenching and grinding, or crowding, this can cause the patient to change their head position resulting in neck discomfort or pain. If we find a patient's proper neck position and jaw posture, and then stabilize their bite with an appliance, a patient's symptoms will be

headache is pain referred to the head from a source in the cervical spine. However, these symptoms from the neck could actually have been caused by a bad bite in the first place.

## What dental issues can cause a bad neck?

- Clenching and grinding
- Worn down or crowded teeth
- Poor posture
- Snoring or sleep apnea
- Severe overbite
- TMJ disorder

As shown in many studies, there is a very close relationship between the upper cervical spine and a person's jaw posture. People may experience neck discomfort or they may experience headaches, jaw pain, ear ringing or even vertigo. The frustrating part for a patient is they are often unaware of the origin of these symptoms. Therefore, dentists who treat TMJ disorders need to be trained in the proper diagnosis of a neck issue and pay close attention to a person's posture and head position. If you have had any symptoms with your head and neck throughout your life, you should consider being evaluated in order to determine if you have a neck or jaw posture misalignment. Luckily, when properly identified, there are very predictable solutions to alleviate these pains.



Head position can have a large effect on the entire body, especially in the jaw and neck. In fact, if your head is positioned just slightly forward it is actually 10 times heavier than if it is properly aligned on top of your spine! Therefore, anything that causes a change in head position and neck curvature can lead to discomfort and pain. Obviously, having poor posture can play a huge role in head position; however, one of the biggest factors that can affect neck curvature and the position of the head is a person's bite. If you have a bite that places your lower jaw backward toward your neck because of teeth grinding, crowding of teeth, or older dental work, you can be at a risk for a TMJ disorder or cervicogenic (neck-related) headaches. A cervicogenic

*Jeffrey S. Haddad D.D.S. of Doolin & Haddad Advanced Dentistry completed his dental education at the University of Michigan in 2001. Dr. Haddad is a fellow of the prestigious Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. He lectures nationally on cosmetic dentistry, TMJ disorders and practice management. For more information, visit [www.rochesteradvanceddentistry.com](http://www.rochesteradvanceddentistry.com).*

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