

Statistics show stress of 2020 is causing increased oral health issues

For the unforeseen future, people around the world have adopted wearing masks while out in public until the pandemic ends. Since mask wearing has never been the norm in the US, many people have experienced unexplained side effects like headaches and jaw pain from wearing masks frequently. While many speculate that wearing a mask decreases your oxygen levels (it doesn't), the actual cause of the pain is from the mask resting on the ears and pressure on the lower jaw.

Most dentists have seen a greater number of stress-related oral health issues among their patients since the start of the pandemic, according to the ADA Health Policy Institute poll. During the poll, 59.4% of dentists reported increased in bruxism (grinding or clenching of the teeth), 53.4% saw more chipped and cracked teeth, and 53.4% reported more frequent temporomandibular disorder symptoms. Also, 26.4% noted an increase in decay in teeth, and 29.7% saw more periodontal disease. Stress, drastically changed schedules, and adapting to the "new normal" has taken a significant toll on people's routines, oral hygiene, and overall health of their mouth and body.

Headaches from Wearing Masks

One of the top complaints of wearing a mask is getting a headache afterward. No, it's not from a lack of oxygen. The headache is actually caused by the trigeminal nerve that branches from your brain, under the scalp and through the large muscle that spans the face. When you wear a mask and place the tight loops over your ears to hold it in place, the tightness yanks on the trigeminal nerves and its structures and results in a low-grade tension headache. The tension on the nerves travels through the nerves and tightens the tentorium memorabile which is the plastic wrap like material that covers your brain. When



Dentally Speaking
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you're stressed, it tightens up, causing a headache.

Jaw Pain from Wearing Masks

Your jaw is located right next to your ear and the jaw joints connect the lower jaw to the brain. Every part connects with another. If you're wearing an N95 mask, you can't

really move your jaw around openly like you could if you weren't wearing it. The lack of movement can cause your jaw to tighten, which can result in jaw pain. The tighter your mask, the more jaw pain you can experience. The tightness of the mask combined with the tension already on your ears can cause both headaches and jaw pain.

What Can You Do?

We understand that wearing a mask can feel like an inconvenience but wearing one can save lives. If you're experiencing headaches and jaw pain from your mask there are a few things you can try.

First, try wearing a looser mask. Although a fabric mask doesn't offer as much protection as an N95 mask, it will feel much more comfortable to wear and your jaw can move more easily.

You can also attach the loops to something that isn't your ears. Wear a hat or a headband and attach buttons to it that you can attach your mask loops too. This can help take the pressure off your ears. If these tips are not relieving your symptoms, luckily, there are very predictable approaches that can alleviate these TMJ symptoms.

We are all dealing with the guidance and regulations in our area, and will continue to abide by these mandated rules as far as masks are concerned. However, please pay attention if you have noticed any increased headaches, tension in the temples or jaws, or neck pain. This could be an underlying TMJ disorder that you have been accommodating with for years that now is affect-

ing your quality of life. If you are suffering with any of these symptoms, find an office that focuses on TMJ disorders and get the relief that you deserve.

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