

Is the Pandemic taking its toll on your health and wellness?

People everywhere are feeling the stress of the pandemic, and many are feeling the negative effect on their body. According to a recent study, prevalence of facial and jaw pain increased by 12% since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The coronavirus has disrupted many aspects of daily life, so it is also no surprise the virus has impacted people's sleep as well. These disruptions have manifested in different ways. Stress and anxiety related to the pandemic and its complications can lead to sleep loss and feelings of daytime fatigue. Our own practice saw a 21% increase in patients suffering from TMJ and sleep disorders. If you are noticing that your jaw feels sore or stiff, you may be grinding your teeth or clenching your jaw, which are common indicators of stress. These behaviors, also known as temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders, can cause pain both in your



Dentally Speaking
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jaw joint and the muscles that support jaw movement. In addition, this distress on your body can adversely affect your sleep causing restlessness, discomfort, and even the life-threatening disorder of sleep apnea.

The connection between Stress and TMJ disorders

Stress tends to bring tension to your muscles, and the jaw is no exception. Anxious habits, like teeth clenching and grinding (known as bruxism), may appear during times of extreme stress. The force of these actions can place significant pressure on your TMJ (jaw joint), which connects your jawbone to your skull. This strain on the joint and nearby nerves can lead to facial aches and pains.

Symptoms associated with TMJ disorders may include:

- Aching pain in and around your ear

- Difficulty chewing or pain while chewing
- Headaches or migraines
- Jaw pain and tenderness
- Limited range of motion when opening your mouth
- Vertigo (dizziness)
- Tinnitus (ringing in ears)

Recognizing your jaw clenching and teeth grinding

If you are suffering from jaw pain, the first step in finding relief is identifying the source. If you find yourself clenching your teeth throughout the day, take note of when it is occurring and what you are doing at the time. See if the clenching correlates to the pain you are feeling. Teeth grinding more commonly occurs during sleep. The most common sign of grinding is tooth wear, which may not be easy to spot on your own. But if you are grinding your teeth at night, you will likely wake up with pain including:

- Sore jaw
- Stiff neck

- Pain mimicking an ear ache or headache

Grinding your teeth at night can also be a sign of sleep apnea, which is the actual stopping of breathing several times an hour. It is a life-threatening condition that can have serious effects on the heart and brain. If you have been told you wake up gasping or if you feel fatigued during the day regardless of how much sleep you are getting, a sleep breathing disorder like sleep apnea may be present.

The Importance of Sleep

The importance of healthy sleep during this pandemic cannot be overstated. A good night's rest is essential for a strong immune system and healthy brain functioning. Sleep also plays a pivotal role in how we manage our moods and mental health. To ensure you are getting the right amount of sleep, we recommend following a consistent routine that includes going to bed and waking up at the same times each day. Spending a lot of time in front of a television or phone may be tempting while you are required to stay at home, but these devices emit a blue light that can negatively impact sleep cycles. Other healthy sleep strategies include exercising daily, spending time outdoors during the day for natural light exposure, and limiting your alcohol and caffeine intake in the hours

leading up to bedtime.

When to seek help for your TMJ symptoms or poor sleep

We are all hopeful that this pandemic life will eventually improve, but unfortunately the damage may have already occurred. If your jaw or facial pain is steady and unrelenting, or your bed partner can hear you grinding your teeth or snoring at night, it may be time to contact your dentist. A properly trained dentist in TMJ or sleep disorders can provide customized appliances to address these issues and give you relief. If teeth grinding goes untreated for too long, it could lead to tooth and gum damage, tooth sensitivity and increasing TMJ pain. If snoring or sleep apnea continues, it can be a life-threatening situation. There are solutions for all of these symptoms that are affecting your quality of life, so please consider seeking help if you are suffering.

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COUGH OR SINUS PROBLEMS?

Winter allergies to dust, mold or indoor pets?

WE CAN HELP.

1

Schedule an appointment

2

Get skin tested

3

Start immunotherapy

Spring decorations, from page 15

The Season of New Beginnings

As they say, April showers bring May flowers. To celebrate the season of new beginnings, set some time aside to plan out this season's garden with fresh flowers, as well as fruits and vegetables to enjoy all summer long. Spruce up your home's outdoor spaces by painting flowerpots bright new colors and by adding new outdoor or solar lights. With longer days approaching, having the

perfect outdoor oasis may invite everyone to spend more time outside.

Try out a Seasonal Spring Recipe

Spring can also be the perfect time to try out a new recipe, whether it is a new side, main dish or a sweet seasonal dessert.

By freshening up home decor, creating a dreamy outdoor space or trying out the latest spring recipes, everyone can affordably find something to be excited for this spring.

★ Welcoming patients of all ages • Evening & Saturday appointments available ★



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