

Healthy You

FAST FACTS FOR YOUR HEALTH

4 Teeth and Jaw Problems That Cause Headache

Few things can derail your day like a headache. And when headaches happen regularly, they can really damage your quality of life. Getting to the root of your head pain is essential to putting an end to it, and you may be surprised to learn that not all headache causes are in your head. In fact, your mouth may be the source.

Below are four common teeth and jaw problems that can lead to headache and what you can do to stop them.

Teeth Grinding

Teeth grinding (which is medically known as bruxism) is a common stress response – and sometimes, you may not even realize you do it (people often grind their teeth while sleeping). Even if you're unaware of your teeth grinding, eventually it will show itself as pain in the teeth, face, jaw and head.

What you can do: Mouthguards, either custom or store-bought, can reduce the damage of teeth grinding while you sleep. But the best way to protect yourself is to get to the source of teeth grinding, which is likely stress. Adopting lifestyle habits that reduce stress, such as exercise and meditation, will help lessen or eliminate teeth grinding and the pain associated with it.

Problems With Teeth or Jaw Alignment

When your teeth or jaw are not properly aligned, it affects your bite. This can cause muscle strain in your mouth that can lead to pain in your head.

What you can do: Alignment problems require your dentist's expertise to fix. Treatment options include crowns, braces or oral surgery.

Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Problems

TMJ problems can lead to headaches and even migraines. With TMJ-related head pain, the link between the mouth and head is clear – the TMJ joint connects your jaw and skull. When pain begins in the jaw, it can move up through your neck and into your head where it can present as frequent headaches.

What you can do: Simple strategies like avoiding chewing on objects that aren't food (such as your nails) can help reduce TMJ problems, but your dentist or doctor will need to diagnose your pain as TMJ related and then develop a treatment plan for you.

Cavities and Gum Disease

You may be surprised to learn that cavities and gum disease may lead to headaches. These two common oral health problems are the source of many toothaches, and a toothache involving certain nerves in the mouth can trigger head pain as well.

What you can do: Getting back to the basics of dental hygiene will reduce your risk for tooth decay and gum disease. That means brushing and flossing twice each day, seeing your dentist twice yearly and eating a diet high in nutrients and low in sugar.

Talk to Your Dentist About Your Headaches

If you experience regular headaches, it's important to tell your dentist at your next preventive visit because your dentist is the only person who can definitely say whether your mouth is a likely source of head pain. Knowing your headache history will help your dentist pay special attention to the oral health problems that contribute to head pain. If your dentist doesn't find issues that are linked to headaches, you should talk to your personal doctor about other causes to help get you on the path toward relief.