



Health Awareness

How A Visit To The Dentist May Be Just What The Doctor Ordered

(NAPSA)—You may not associate headache relief with a trip to the dentist, but dental care may be your best medicine.

Although many people don't think to see their dentists for symptoms such as chronic headaches, neck pain or sleeping disorders, advances in dental research and technology have led to more comprehensive treatment for problems originating from or related to the mouth, head and neck.

Dentists, particularly specialists, are increasingly helping patients overcome these types of chronic pain.

"People with chronic pain likely visit multiple physicians seeking pain relief, but they don't often think to consult a dentist as well," says Noshir Mehta, DMD, MDS, MS, director of the Craniofacial Pain Center at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine in Boston. "Integrating dental expertise into assessing and treating head, neck and facial pain, however, may greatly benefit patients. Doing so may not only treat, but may also cure pain that patients feared would never go away."

According to Dr. Mehta, talk to your dentist if you have sought treatment for, but are still regularly experiencing, any of the following symptoms:

- Headaches: migraines, tension and/or vascular;
- Neck pain: stiffness and/or noise during movement of neck;
- Temporomandibular joint



Photo courtesy of Tufts University photography

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disorders (TMJ)/jaw joint pain: clicking, popping and grating noises and/or locking of the jaw;

- Ear pain: ringing in the ears, stuffiness and dizziness;

- Eye pain: pressure and difficulty focusing;

- Shoulder and arm pain: weakness, tingling and numbness of fingers;

- Changes in bite: pain in teeth, inability to chew without pain, uncomfortable bite;

- Tightness in mouth or jaw: clenching and grinding of teeth;

- Sleep disorders: sleep apnea and/or snoring.

The Craniofacial Pain Center at Tufts develops treatment plans for patients that include not only dental expertise but, if needed, treatment from physicians, psychologists, chiropractors, physical therapists, acupuncturists, specialists in integrative medicine

and other specialists in pain management.

"Much of our success at the center is due to collaborating with other health professionals to offer patients multidisciplinary treatments," says Dr. Mehta. "I encourage people to seek this same sort of multidisciplinary treatment by requesting that their dentists and primary care physicians work together to improve their condition."

Treatment options for pain related to the face, head and neck may include:

- Wearing dental mouth guards and/or appliances to relax muscles and stabilize joints;

- Identifying and modifying behaviors, such as teeth clenching, that may cause chronic pain;

- Attending physical or occupational therapy sessions;

- Taking medications, such as muscle relaxants or anti-anxiety drugs;

- Educating patients on nutrition and home care;

- Getting regular massage, acupressure or acupuncture therapy;

- Receiving injections to block nerve action that causes pain;

- Managing stress.

"People often live with chronic head, neck or face pain when they don't need to," says Dr. Mehta. "We need to get the word out that now there are more options. Talking to your dentist about your chronic head, neck or face pain may be an integral part of the solution."