

HEALTHY LIVING

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Are you suffering from headaches or neck and shoulder pain? It could be because your jaw is out of alignment. According to the Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies (LVI), "the majority of people suffer to a greater or lesser degree from TMD" (aka Temporomandibular Joint Disorder). The TMD is the joint that connects the upper and lower jaw. The area is made up of muscles, bones, and tendons that work hundreds of times a day allowing you to chew and talk.

The activity in your head muscles, neck muscles, and head posture are all directly related to the muscles and activity in your teeth and jaw joints; thus, when your jaws are misaligned not only may your teeth and jaws ache, but your facial muscles, shoulders, and neck may uncomfortably ache or tense up as well. Symptoms, including neck and shoulder aches, headaches, facial pain, ear congestion, and clenching or grinding your teeth while sleeping, may all be indicative of this common jaw misalignment disorder called Temporomandibular Joint Disorder (TMD).

Because headaches, upper body muscle, and facial irritations are so common among women, I decided to ask Dr. Lisa Kalfas about TMD and about the statistical chances that these myofascial symptoms may be symptoms of TMD and not other non-jaw related ailments? Dr. Kalfas smiled because she understood just how often women underwent pain,

aching and cramping. I asked, "How do I know whether or not my headaches and jaw aches are from TMD and not from migraines or from a cold?" "Well," Dr. Kalfas calmly replied, "we would have to sit down and have a thorough evaluation of the specifics of your symptoms, then we can begin examining your teeth and jaw structure from there."

A BETTER BITE, A HEALTHIER LIFE

By Tien Tong



Dr. Lisa Kalfas

Dr. Kalfas proves her extensive knowledge and passion in dentistry through every confident response. She has been working in dentistry for the past 18 years and is highly regarded by many of her colleagues and patients. Dr. Kalfas not only owns and runs her own clinic at 2300 Canyon Blvd in Boulder, CO, but she also teaches post-doctoral cosmetic and advanced dentistry courses to other dentists at LVI. Dr. Kalfas focuses on a newer, more advanced method of dentistry called neuromuscular dentistry.

Neuromuscular dentistry is a practice that focuses on facial (specifically the jaw) muscles, tissues, and nerves to move the imperfect jaw into an optimal position. The aim for repositioning the jaw is to relieve individuals from symptoms such as headaches, facial aches, teeth sensitivity, and neck and shoulder aches; symptoms that may have been the result or the cause of the jaw misalignment. While traditional dentistry evaluates only teeth, bones, and gums, neuromuscular dentistry works with the muscles to determine an optimal comfortable position for the jaw. Neuromuscular dentists have two main goals: Striving for

a healthier life by alleviating upper body and facial aches and pains through their possible connections to the TMJ, and to cosmetically restore teeth that may have been worn from TMD to create beautiful smiles.

So, what may have caused malfunction in the TMJ? Well as aforementioned, the jaw muscles, teeth, and head and neck muscles all intertwine. Say you got in a car accident and injured your neck; it is possible that the neck muscles may then cause muscles in your TMJ to work harder and thus, cause aching and jaw misalignment. Then consequently, due to the frequency of jaw grinding and facial muscle aches, you may begin to get more frequent tension headaches. Or likewise, say you never got into an accident but get frequent headaches from an unknown cause. Sometimes, a misaligned bite may cause teeth aches and teeth grinding that may result in a headache. According to the LVI, "Tension headaches are the most common type of headache, and the TMJ headache is a tension type of headache."

Dr. Kalfas has a sophisticated way of determining whether or not the bite is the cause of these myofascial symptoms. Most commonly, Dr. Kalfas will use a computerized system which utilizes Electromyography (EMG) to evaluate muscle activity in the head and neck to decide whether your bite is okay in its present state or whether your bite needs to change to move your jaw into a more comfortable, favorable, attractive position. The EMG measures and reads muscle activity in eight different areas of your face.

Next, Dr. Kalfas will then work to relax the masticatory muscles by the use of a machine called the Transcutaneous Electrical Neural Stimulation (TENS). Once your facial muscles are in a relaxed state, Dr. Kalfas may then evaluate your present jaw

position and determine an optimal position for your bite.

Now, Dr. Kalfas will begin her treatment of re-establishing your bite. "Look at it this way," says Lori Rae, a business assistant and patient of Dr. Kalfas, "when your teeth are misaligned, it programs your jaw to work a certain way and the rest of your facial, neck, and shoulder muscles to ache and hurt. Dr. Kalfas 'de-programs' that present jaw alignment to create a more even smile and alleviate your facial muscles from the pain of the previously misaligned jaw."

The initial treatment that Dr. Kalfas implements on her patients is the use of a repositioning device called an orthotic. Orthotics are custom made plastic appliances (clear and lightweight) that are worn over your teeth to establish a new bite. Depending on the severity of the misaligned bite, Dr. Kalfas may also recommend adjustments to the current bite, reconstruction of the bite with crowns and veneers, or repositioning of the teeth with orthodontic braces.

Through her neuromuscular approach to dentistry, Dr. Kalfas has created beautiful smiles that have often significantly enhanced the lifestyles of her patients. In fact, the proper jaw alignments and aesthetic reconstructions have often uplifted the corners of patients' mouths and elongated their faces, giving them a more youthful appearance!

Dr. Kalfas uses all the latest in technology, approaching dentistry holistically with the use of lasers and a mercury-free environment. Dr. Kalfas says, "We take a lot of time to make sure we are getting the teeth in a good position so that patients obtain optimal results." For more information, contact smile consultant, Dr. Kalfas, at (303) 447-9161.

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