Ear Pain? Your Teeth Might Be to Blame—TMJ, Grinding & Infections Most Doctors Miss Transcript

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Mouth Health and Ear Pain Connection

Do you have ear pain that won't go away? Your mouth may actually be the one to blame. Today we're going to uncover the connection between ear pain, jaws, and mouth health.

Because if you've never noticed, your mouth is actually connected to the rest of you. and a lot of what goes on here may show up in your ears. Let's talk about how this happens.

First of all, your jaw joint, this is the part of the jaw we know, but the joint part is right in front of the ear. When you open and close, you can feel something moving.

Well, that's literally a ball that fits into a socket and the socket is situated right in front of the ear canal. So if there are changes with that jaw joint itself, if you have inflammation in the area, if something in the bite or the way the teeth are fitting together changes the position or the stress or strain on that joint, it can impact the ear canal behind it.

So ear pain and ear problems, stuffiness, even plugged ears and sometimes even ringing can actually be from the jaw joint.

TMJ Dysfunction and Jaw Joint Symptoms

So let's get into the different connections and what you can do about them naturally. The number one overlooked cause of ear problems is actually TMJ dysfunction.

What that means is the joint itself is having issues. What are signs and symptoms that you can look for if this is indeed the problem? It's often going to show up as clicking or popping when you open or close or tenderness when you do that.

It doesn't feel good. It's stiff. It really doesn't want to open on its own. All of those are signs that something is going on with this complex. It might be the joint and it might be the muscles that are supporting that joint.

So this can be caused from trauma. If you get hit or hurt in this area, it can also be caused from things going on down here. So bite issues, bite misalignment, clenching and grinding due to other things we're going to talk about in a minute.

All of these may impact the way that this joint is fitting into the socket and the way all the muscles are interacting, which can lead to the symptoms that we often contribute to ear problems.

So what can you do about this? Some very simple things you can do at home are magnesium. You can actually use a magnesium spray and you can spray it right on the muscles here.

You can do gentle massage or acupressure in these areas. You can even focus in on what can be causing this muscle problem or the joint problem and that's really where I like to steer people is let's figure out the root cause of the problem.

So that's visiting a dentist. We may actually be looking at some sort of an oral appliance to position the joint in a different place to allow the muscles to relax.

Bruxism, Clenching, and Sleep Breathing Issues

There's a lot of things that we can do, changing position of the teeth is one of them. So if this is something that persists or it's getting worse, It's probably time to visit a dentist to see if there's something with the teeth that's impacting the joint.

The next thing that can show up as ear problems, but that really is attributed to the mouth, is something called bruxism, or you may call it actually grinding or clenching.

Now, the signs and symptoms of this are waking up in the morning with just sore muscles. You're sore up in here in these temporalis areas, you're sore down in the masseters, back of the neck is tired and sore and you wake up feeling like you've been working out all night.

Or you get tired during the day chewing gum or chewing hard foods because your muscles are already tired and sore from all the work they did all night long.

Why are you doing this? Why are you grinding and clenching your teeth? A lot of people blame it on stress. They say, I'm just so stressed out. This is why I'm doing it.

But that's actually not usually the case. The reason that the body grinds or clenches the teeth is to tighten up muscles. When the muscles are tightened up, it allows more air to pass.

So more often than not, the reason for the grinding and clenching stems all the way back to The body isn't getting enough air at night when sleeping. We call this sleep apnea or obstructed sleep breathing.

What can you do about it? And why does the body grind or clench? Well, when it grinds or clenches, it tightens up all the muscles in the neck, all the muscles in the mouth, the tongue, and allows more room for air to pass.

So we have to back all the way up to, why is the body not getting enough air to begin with? This may stem from an infection in the mouth, an infected root canal tooth, or area where a tooth was removed that didn't heal properly.

It might stem back to, I had teeth taken out for braces and my mouth was too small for my tongue to fit now. Or even developmentally, my mouth just didn't grow very big, I've got a tongue tie.

Other issues like that, if you have crowded or crooked or misaligned teeth, there's a good chance that there's not enough space in your mouth for your tongue and teeth and tissue to fit.

They have to fall backward into the airway. So at nighttime, your body squeezes everything to allow the air to pass. So what can you do about it? Well, a couple of things you can do at home are relax those muscles with magnesium, again, a magnesium spray.

You can also mouth tape, which allows this part of the muscles to stay together. and allows more breathing and air to get through the nose.

Dental Infections and Wisdom Tooth Problems

But the big one is really getting to the root cause and that's visiting a dentist, getting a cone beam CT scan that shows us this airway in three dimensions and we can say, ah, that's why you're not getting enough air because the tissue is long and stretched out in the way because of an infection or because there is just simply not enough room in that mouth for everything to fit.

So get to the root cause, allow enough air to get through and the muscles can relax. Often this takes the tension and problems off of this joint, which alleviates the problems in the ear.

Another one is a dental infection. You know, how do you determine is this a dental infection or an ear infection? Well, especially upper molars, if there is a problem here, it will radiate pain back to the ears.

So if you've gone to the doctor, they say there's no infection here, but you know something is not right. start looking at your teeth. You might also notice tenderness to bite, maybe some sensitivity, even a kind of a bad or a salty taste in your mouth when you're swallowing.

All of these things indicate that something is going on with the tooth. So how do you determine this? You go to visit the dentist. We take some dental x-rays, particularly a conbeam CT scan, and we determine what is the real source of infection.

One of the common sources may be an impacted wisdom tooth. So if you pay attention, where's the wisdom tooth? They're right back here. They're the furthest back teeth in proximity to that ear canal.

So if you have an impacted wisdom tooth that has gotten infected, perhaps there's a little flap of skin things have been able to get under. They've been able to just cause havoc in there.

Bacteria are growing and spreading. That will also lead to sometimes soreness in the gums, that bad taste I talked about, and swelling or soreness back into that ear area.

So again, go visit the dentist. See if this is tooth related. The last one that can show up as an ear problem that isn't is a sinus issue. Now, this also may be looked at by an ENT, right?

An ENT can look at your ears. They can look at your sinuses. But I have so many patients who have come in. I can tell you story after story of patients that have come in.

saying that they've had three sinus surgeries, that they've been to multiple ENTs, that their sinuses are always clogged, their ears are always a little plugged, but it's not anything that the ENT has been able to clear up.

So we take a cone beam CT scan. I remember one exact gentleman, this was the craziest story. He said that his ears were having all sorts of plugging and issues.

He couldn't quite equalize it when he'd get off a plane. And he had this terrible smell in his head. He literally said it smelled like a dead body. And he worked for search and rescue.

So he said, I was very familiar with the dead body smell. I kept looking for one and could never find one.

Sinus Issues and When to See a Dentist

It was actually a dead tooth. He'd been to ENTs. He'd had sinus surgery. He'd had all of this done. What was it? It was a dead upper molar. It was so infected it had literally eaten a hole in the floor of his sinus and was filling his sinus full of infection.

That infection is going to create inflammation in the area. It's going to impact everything on that same side. Now, he asked, as you might ask as well, why did an ENT not see this?

They're not looking for this. They're looking for things right here in your sinus. They're not looking below to see what could be creating the issues in the sinus.

So that brings the next question people often ask. When should I see a dentist for my ear problems and when should I see a doctor? Well, typically you're going to start with the doctor.

You're going to go there first. You're going to have them look, make sure this isn't an ear infection. The last thing I want is for you to have a ruptured eardrum or something of that sort, and we're looking at a tooth.

So go get it cleared by your doctor if they say, no, there's nothing here that we can treat and you still have pain. you still have inflammation, you still have fullness or ringing or problems, then it's time to come and visit the dentist.

And again, what do we start with? A cone beam CT scan where we can see that ear and we can see everything else in the surrounding area. These are the kinds of things that we do here at Total Care Dental every single day, and this is the kind of information I teach at Living Well with Dr.

Michelle. Why? because these are often the missing pieces that people are struggling with, but don't have an answer for. So if that's you, if you have constant and persistent ear problems, you've been everywhere, you've tried everything, and it's not getting better, most likely it's something to do with your mouth.

So go visit a health-based dentist, go get a cone beam CT scan, come and visit us. We'd love to see you. And let's finally get to the root cause of what's causing those ear issues.