

Dental Specialist Mark Breiner Tells How He Corrects Painful Malady of Jaw

BY MARJORIE PASSERI

While most health professionals continue to specialize and shrink their area of expertise, at least one Trumbull dentist has expanded the role of dental science to encompass not only cavities and gum disease but also temporalmandibular joint dysfunction (TMJ).

Although TMJ disease may not seem like a well known malady, according to Dr. Mark Breiner of High Ridge Road, it is much more common than most people realize. It carries a gamut of symptoms ranging from ear pain, headaches and neck pain to neurosis.

Known by some as "The Great Imposter" it can mimic many diseases and has been mistaken for everything from sinusitis to arthritis.

The main problem is a malocclusion of the jaw which causes a slide when the teeth come together or have an improper bite. This malocclusion is caused by the improper alignment of the ball and socket joint of the jaw.

Helped Student

According to Dr. Breiner, one of his recent patients with this affliction was a Trumbull High School student. Dr. Breiner explained that this student had been an active gymnast when the onset of severe headaches began to restrict her gym activities and ultimately caused her to miss six months of school.

"Before she was referred to my office by her neurologist she had been seen by a range of medical specialists and was taking strong pain killers. Nothing, however, relieved her constant pain that radiated down her neck into her arms and fingertips," said Dr. Breiner.

After three months of treatment, Dr. Breiner reported that the pain of the Trumbull student was reduced and she was able to return to school and assume a normal life.

Treatment for the improper bite which frequently results in severe pain to many, involves a process of relaxing the jaw muscles and then correcting the bite. For some, this means a recontouring of the tooth structure, while for others it only requires a simple adjustment to the surface of one or two teeth to correct the "slide" problem.

According to Dr. Breiner, there is no association between the severity of malocclusion or slide and the resulting amount of pain.

He explained that even a slight improper bite may cause the jaw muscles to go into a state of spasm. Yet he explained many others may go through life with a severe bite adjustment problem and never experience TMJ.

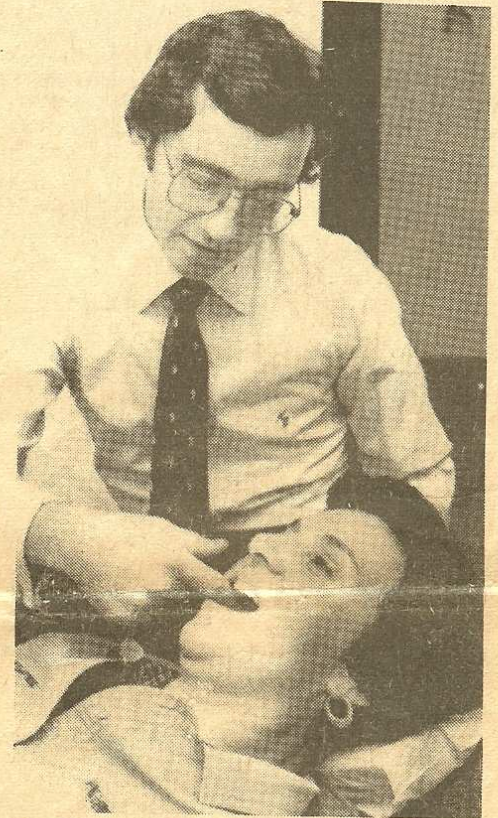
Dr. Breiner said that the percentage of his dental patients being treated for TMJ makes up approximately one-third of his total practice. He explained he gets referrals from other dentist and medical doctors from throughout Fairfield County.

"Most dentists could correct this problem if they wanted to spend the time but it is very tedious work and many opt to refer the patient to me rather than become involved in the treatment," said Dr. Breiner.

Tension Headaches

The majority of tension headaches can be attributed to this affliction, said Dr. Breiner. He added that more physicians and lay people should be made aware of the problem because it is relatively easy to diagnose and should be considered before a headache patient undergoes an extensive medical work up.

Through the use of a plastic appliance, Dr. Breiner can temporarily correct the



HIS TECHNIQUE — Dr. Mark Breiner demonstrates the process of massaging the jaw of TMJ sufferers on his receptionist and former TMJ patient Ellen Krumper.

(Photo by John Harvey)

malocclusion and then begin to massage the jaw muscles. After making a cast model of the teeth, he can examine the bite, identify the problems, and begin work to correct it.

He said that former dental brace wearers should be particularly aware of this possible condition.

He explained the gross movement of teeth by braces severely affects the bite and that if the bite is not carefully adjusted, a condition of TMJ may result.

Dr. Breiner recommended any individual suspecting the condition of TMJ to see their dentist or medical doctor and discuss the problem before taking harmful pain medications.