

Pain triggered by muscle can cause headaches

The true cause of dental pain is often not as simple as looking at a tooth and seeing a huge dark hole in the top or side of a tooth. Not uncommonly, people present complaining of pain from a tooth, or often several teeth, that have been excellently treated with root canal therapy, especially lower molars. When asked if there is any history of tooth fracture, abscesses visibly found on x-rays, or pain that was clearly localized to the offending teeth, often the answer is “no”. Root canal therapy was performed on these teeth, or sometimes they have even been extracted, simply because they were hurting, and the patient is then disgruntled that the pain did not go away. Interestingly, these folks nearly always report that they have a history of frequent headaches. In fact, nearly all of them have a history of suffering from “tension” or “sinus” headaches.

Often during examining the jaw muscles of these patients



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by rolling the muscles between my thumb and fingers with light pressure, taught and ropey bands can be felt in classic areas. Light squeezing of these bands usually elicits pain which may radiate through specific areas of the face. Sometimes, the exact “toothache” can be momentarily duplicated by palpation of these muscle bands, which are called trigger points, or headaches can be replicated instantaneously.

Trigger points are hyperirritable spots in skeletal muscles where the cellular components in the muscle cells in those areas are dysfunctional, causing irregular contractions or “knots” in the muscle. They are painful to palpation and often cause radiating pain.

For example, trigger points in the masseter muscles (the large muscles on each side of the jaw that clench) can refer pain directly to the upper or the lower molars, depending on where the trigger point is in the muscle.

Treatment for jaw muscle pain is complex and should be managed by a dentist who is adequately trained in managing muscle and joint disorders, and many dentists are not. If you are suffering from unexplained or frequent headaches or unusual dental pain, talk to your dentist about a possible referral or other appropriate treatment options.

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For questions about dental health or to schedule a complementary consultation, call 330-364-2011, visit www.doctorhuff.net, or ask your regular dentist.