

You have just been told that you have stress related pain in your face. You are probably feeling rather confused and therefore, this information sheet has been designed to help you understand your problem.

Toothache and other dental problems are fairly straight forward. They respond to simple treatments and do not reoccur, but other pains which may develop as a reaction to stress are more complicated.

### Facial Arthromyalgia

This is a dull ache with occasional severe attacks affecting your jaw joint and its muscles. You may also experience other symptoms such as clicking in the joint, difficulty opening your mouth and spasm in the jaw muscles which extend to the head and down the neck. Ear symptoms, such as a sense of fullness or buzzing and dizziness are also possible.

### Typical Facial Pain

This is a dull ache, or a sharp pain affecting the cheeks, eyes, jaws and all non-muscular parts of the face. The pain may come and go and may be worse when you are tired and under stress.

### Odontalgia

This is a continuous pain or severe discomfort in the teeth or in the tooth socket after an extraction, in the absence of any unusual dental cause. The pain may be made worse by dental treatment and can move from tooth to tooth.

### Oral Dysaesthesia

This is a group of problems which includes a burning or altered sensation in the tongue or gums or a nasty taste. Some patients have a sense of increased or decreased salivation. It may also be difficult for you to wear dentures or tolerate new crowns or bridges, despite many attempts to help you.

Another related problem is an unpleasant awareness that your teeth do not meet comfortably. This is called 'Phantom Bite Syndrome'.

These pains often persist for long period of time and will also come and go when you are under stress. The kind of situations that particularly affects us are; long term problems such as difficulties with children's schooling, housing, marital, being lonely, ill health in the family or more acute upsetting events such as bereavement, divorce or moving house. It may surprise you to know that getting married, being promoted or having a baby are also events that put you under stress.

Many patients also find that they suffer from other stress related problems such as tension headaches and neck aches, migraine, chronic lower back pain, painful periods, stomach pains (especially irritable bowel) and itchy skin. All of these problems occurring together, suggest that

Emotional stress causes widespread symptoms in certain susceptible individuals.

### Treatment

In order to make a diagnosis, we need to take a full detailed history and sometimes do blood tests and x-rays. It is important that you understand that the diagnosis of these pains does not mean that we think you are imagining your pain. The pain is real and arises in cramped muscles and dilated blood vessels as a response to stress.

We also prescribe anti-depressant drugs, not because we think you are depressed, but because we have shown that these drugs help to relieve pain. You may need to take them for some months to ensure relief. The drugs are not addictive and have no serious side effects, although some patients may initially suffer drowsiness, a dry mouth or occasionally constipation.

If you have any questions please ask your doctor.

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