

A Balanced Out Bite...

As a profession, we dentists try really hard to get to know who our patients are. The person behind the smile really matters. This is because the better you know someone, the better you can custom tailor a plan for dental health. For any individual, there are many paths to healthy teeth and healthy gums.

Recently, I had a patient come in and explain to me that he has always had a “bad bite.” This is a very common complaint that can be caused by a variety of different situations; missing teeth, genetics, mouth breathing, crowded teeth, worn down crowns and fillings, thumb sucking, bruxism (tooth grinding), trauma...the list goes on for days. The symptoms of a malocclusion (dentist speak for “bad bite”) can range anywhere from sore and tired jaw muscles to the occasional broken tooth to constant, debilitating headaches and jaw joint pain. Each malocclusion on each individual has a different set of problems to correct and sort out. For some people, a bad bite is simply annoying, while for others, a bad bite can cause years of misery.

Fixing a bad bite is a predictable and successful clinical process. I say process, because correcting a disease that has been years in the making often takes time. There are a number of ways to fix a malocclusion. A lengthy clinical description of the different orthotics and long term stabilization procedures would put even my most interested colleagues into a deep sleep. So let us just stick to the basics here and leave the details for a visit with your dentist.

A person’s bite is a balancing act between three separate systems: the teeth, the muscles of the head and neck, and the two jaw joints. As with any complex system, if one of the three is not functioning correctly, the others will try to compensate. It is usually this compensation that leads to pain and problems. Conceptually, fixing a bad bite is simple, balance out the bite so that the jaws, muscles, and teeth work in harmony. Clinically, fixing someone’s bite is a bit more tedious.

To make a long story short, a malocclusion is often corrected in two phases. The first phase consists of using some type of mouthpiece (orthotic splint) to find where an individual’s bite needs to be. For most people, there is a three-dimensional window where the joints, teeth, and muscles all balance out. Unfortunately, some of us have a smaller symptom free window than others.

The second phase of treatment consists of maintaining the corrected bite long term. Once the jaws and muscles are in harmony, the teeth need to be reset to the new, improved bite. There are many ways this can be accomplished. Braces (orthodontics), crowns and bridges, and metal partial dentures can all hold a corrected bite in place.

Remember, a bad bite is not something you’re stuck with. At your next visit, ask your dentist what she or he can do for you.

Until next time, keep smiling.

-Please send correspondence to Drs. Parrish through www.ParrishDental.com.