

## The Many Causes of a Bad Bite...

“Doc, I’m going to be hard to work on because I’ve always had a bad bite. No matter what I’ve had done, my teeth just don’t fit together right.”

The dental term for a “bad bite” is malocclusion. Malocclusions actually come in many forms and there are many ways to treat each type. Often, a bad bite involves much more than just the teeth and the way they touch.

There are five systems that must cooperate to give a person their proper bite. The teeth, the jaw joints, the muscles of the head and neck, the bones of the face and jaws, and the nerves that serve these other parts all work in unison to make a bite what it is. If any of these systems is out of whack, a malocclusion occurs.

Loss of teeth and tooth wear are one of the most common causes of malocclusion in adults. Losing a single tooth will generally cause the others around it to shift. Throw in a couple more missing teeth and a person’s bite can get totally unbalanced. Clenching or grinding can also cause teeth to shift or can wear them down so that they do not work at their original height.

Properly functioning jaw joints are crucial to a healthy bite. Trauma is a common cause of jaw joint damage. In a strange twist, malocclusions are also a major cause of TMD (jaw joint disease). In other words a bad bite can cause TMD, and vice versa.

The muscles that move the lower jaw up, down, and side to side are a key component to healthy occlusion. Interferences with the way that teeth come together can cause these muscles to splint and spasm. These spasms can protect certain teeth from getting damaged in the short term, but can lead to headaches and jaw pain over time.

The size of the upper and lower jaws has a huge effect on the alignment of teeth. If the jaws are not the proper size to match the size of the teeth, a person’s bite and tooth alignment will be compromised. In other words, small jaws and big teeth lead to crooked teeth and a malocclusion.

Finally, all of these systems have nerves and blood vessels that supply nutrients to the system and feedback to our brains. A malocclusion can lead to damage or pinching of these “supply lines” and cause symptoms in the teeth, muscles, and jaw joints.

The good news is that modern dentistry has a solution to each of these problems. There are a variety of treatments that can fix or greatly improve the causes and symptoms of a bad bite. Your bite does not always have to be “bad.”

Until next time, keep smiling.

-Please send ideas to Drs. Parrish at [www.ParrishDental.com](http://www.ParrishDental.com).