

## A Sore Jaw...

I thought it was a typical morning. I woke up with the kids, started making coffee, and yawned. Then the pain hit me.

I felt like someone had punched me in the left side of the face during the night. Not only that, but I suddenly couldn't open my mouth much and my teeth weren't touching on one side. Had I been attacked? My lovely wife was a bit annoyed with me before we drifted off to sleep...

Actually, it was more likely that I'd been kicked by a three year old. Or not. We were on a mini family vacation and the kids had decided to have a slumber party in the hotel room by switching beds. Mom and son, Dad with daughter. The kids slept well as a result of a day of swimming. Mom and Dad, not so much. Kids are squirmy, kicky, and there was even a bit of sleep talking. At least the kids woke up earlier than normal.

Luckily, my roommate (and wife) is a dentist. Plus, she's an expert in jaw pain and problems. A quick exam (with un-gloved hands) showed that I was having an acute spasm of my left masseter muscle. No worries. "Take some ibuprofen, tough it up, and go get the kids some breakfast while I enjoy the coffee you just made me," she said.

I know she's a lot nicer to her REAL patients. I've listened in.

It's ironic when a dentist has a dental problem. Actually, it makes us better doctors. I always learn from my own treatment.

Acute jaw problems are a very common occurrence. What happened to me happens to people every morning. For some reason, I had been grinding and clenching my teeth the night before. My main chewing muscle on my left side was all tensed up and my early morning yawn stretched it out and strained it. The muscle compensated by spasming to protect itself. Pain and an altered bite ensued.

There is no quick fix for a muscle spasm. Anti-inflammatory medications help. Some patients get good results from prescription muscle relaxers. I took the maximum dose of over-the-counter ibuprofen for two days. As with any muscle strain, moist heat helped to relax the muscle. My dentist also suggested that I keep my mouth shut to rest it all day.

By dinner time, things were getting better and I was able to gently eat soft food. A little wine might have also helped and I woke up the next morning with everything close to normal. In two days, I was back in business.

Jaw pain can range from minor, acute attacks (such as mine) to extremely painful lifelong problems. Any problem lasting more than a couple of days should be treated by a well trained dentist.

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Please send Dr. Parrish comments through [www.ParrishDental.com](http://www.ParrishDental.com).