

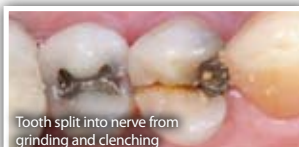
# CHEW ON THIS: A Bad Bite May Be Causing Your Headaches—But Treatment Is Available



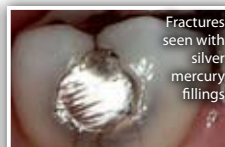
Silver mercury filling with fractured cusp



Tooth split into nerve from grinding and clenching



Tooth split into nerve from grinding and clenching



Fractures seen with silver mercury fillings



Tooth wear from grinding

**Are migraines or tension headaches an unwelcome but normal part of your life? Do you often wake up with a headache, a stiff jaw or sore teeth—or experience this discomfort during the day?** The answer isn't more pain medication. You may be suffering from "occlusal disease", or "bite disease", says dentist Dr. Lisa Marie Samaha of Port Warwick Dental Arts in Newport News. Tooth decay and periodontal disease are the two most commonly diagnosed oral diseases. According to Dr. Samaha, occlusal disease often goes undetected.

Occlusal disease is rarely diagnosed and treated and includes issues like clenching and grinding habits which cause not only head and neck pain, but also cracked fillings and teeth, inflammation of the gums and breakdown of the jawbone around the teeth. Cracks in teeth can cause extensive damage, requiring expensive crowns and root canals. In some cases, **"the teeth may have to be removed because the powerful forces of the bite can cause the teeth to split into the nerve, up the root and into the bone,"** Samaha says.

But Samaha and her team are skilled at treating a badly-aligned bite, as well as helping their patients protect their bite when they are unable to keep from engaging in the typical human stress response of clenching and grinding. With their most conservative treatment, they can help patients minimize headaches and jaw pain, often overnight, and with no medications. **"When the bite is out of balance and the jaw muscles are activated in clenching and/or grinding activity, the muscles of the head and neck go into spasm, triggering certain nerve endings which in turn, trigger headaches,"** she says. "Once we help get the jaw muscles relaxed, we might need to gently re-contour certain tiny spots on patients' teeth, to help balance the bite. We take the pressure off individual teeth which are being hit hardest, which allows us to spread the biting forces more evenly among all the teeth in the mouth.

This allows the muscles to remain in better balance. My goal for our headache patients is to get them free from medication. If their headaches are merely grinding or clenching related, we are able to do so, sometimes overnight. A bad bite and bad habits can cause TMJ problems where the needs are more complex, taking time to work through."

Registered nurse Tracy Meister is one of many success stories. **"My physician referred me to Dr. Samaha for evaluation and treatment of my daily migraines and TMJ pain because he could not help me,"** says Meister of Newport News. "Medications were unsuccessful at keeping me comfortable. I used to awaken every morning in pain. My jaws, my entire face, my neck and shoulders felt tight and hurt all the time. I even had terrible muscle spasms that would come and go throughout the day. Within days of having Dr. Samaha treat me for migraines, I was more rested and relaxed. My face was not sore and I had minimal back, neck and shoulder pain. **Because of Dr. Samaha's treatment, I do not clench or grind my teeth anymore. I am no longer damaging my teeth, my gums and my jawbone. I am not cracking my fillings or suffering from migraines like I used to."**

Early intervention and treatment can protect the teeth before they crack. **"A lot of times patients come in and they're complaining that all their teeth hurt,"** Samaha says. **"They can't chew. Their entire mouth is aching.** Typically, we find they have been going through a tremendously stressful time at home or work. It's not unusual for me to see emergency patients every week who have split or cracked off large pieces of their teeth. Much of the time, they're in excruciating pain and the tooth must be removed. It's especially sad because in almost every case, the problem could have been avoided with an advanced, microscopic dental evaluation done previously."

A dentist can diagnose with the level of a surgical microscope by using a special intra-oral camera the size of a pen. In Dr. Samaha's practice, cracks and decay are able to be discovered often before the problem becomes painful or really serious. **"I won't diagnose or treat without this level of technology. Microscopic evaluation is indispensable to me. If we can find a problem when it is smaller, we can save our patients time, money, disfigurement and pain."**

**"We can find the cracks before the teeth split,"** she says. We see many of the cracks around old mercury/silver fillings because these fillings expand and contract 3–4 times that of natural tooth structure. When cracks are found sooner, we can treat with plastic or porcelain fillings as opposed to full crowns, root canals, or even extraction."

When migraine and jaw pain is replaced with a balanced bite and cracked teeth are discovered early, Dr. Samaha's patients are ready to smile again—anytime.

**"Dr. Samaha's conservative care has drastically improved my quality of life,"** Meister says. **"All of this relief with no medications. That is the best part of all."**



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