



Family & Cosmetic Dentistry

by Dr. Mary Jane Hanlon

TMD: Ancient insights into modern woes

Our ancient ancestors certainly had their share of problems, but grinding their teeth probably wasn't one of them. Starving to death, freezing to death, riding off a cliff while testing out that new wheel contraption – these things caused many a bad day for our distant ancestors. But judging by their skeletons, ancient people's jaws were pretty healthy. One of the reasons for this, dentists believe, is that ancient people chewed a lot more than we do, eating small amounts of food throughout the day, rather than sitting down to three square meals. And the food they chewed was much rougher, fibrous and coarse than our food today. This unprocessed food often contained a little sand or grit, which added to the abrasive effect on their teeth.

Over time, the typical Australopithecus or Neanderthal found himself with basically flat teeth, missing the bumps and ridges, called cusps, that mark modern teeth. And while he would have had more trouble stripping electrical wire or opening a pop bottle with his teeth (which, by the way, one should never do!), he probably had less trouble with such modern woes as temporomandibular disorder (TMD) and

bruxism (teeth grinding).

TMD and bruxism can be caused by the malalignment of a person's bite, called malocclusion, and can cause discomfort and pain.

But fear not. While human evolution may not have given us better bites, it has given us big brains. And some people have used their big brains to develop state of the art dentistry, which can provide treatment for TMD and bruxism.

So, if you experience pain in your jaw, frequent headaches or a clicking sound when you open or close your mouth, be sure to see your dentist.

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