

# Mind Body Healing

**D**O YOU HAVE PAIN IN YOUR JAW? DO YOU KNOW that tension can cause headaches? Does your dentist say that you need a bite guard because you grind your teeth?

## Now you can alleviate jaw tension from the inside out.

Almost everyone has excessive tension in their jaw. For many people this tension shows up as:

- headaches in the morning after a night of teeth grinding
- pain and tension in the face, shoulders and upper back
- facial expressions that hide what you are really feeling, like smiling when you are angry and not crying when you are sad.
- tooth and ear aches
- the inability to take a full breath

Our mouths and jaws are the centers of expression in our faces. Not only do we smile, frown, laugh and speak, but we also hold back forms of expression by tightening and constricting.

The area of the mouth and jaw is a significant repository of both

physical tension and emotional charge. At our birth we instinctively reach out to attach to another human for nourishment in order to survive. We had no choice but to reach out and yet we had no control over the reception we received. It is from the quality of those first vital relationships that we learned what we could expect from the world. All this is mirrored in the way we hold our mouth and jaw today.

The way we hold our jaw has become a habit. The history regarding the original circumstances that established our patterns of expression and holding long ago became unconscious. Now we experience the cycles of reaction and pain with the accompanying pain and tension.

To gain access to the information behind the patterns we need to pay attention to what is happening in our mouth and jaw during the different situations that arise over the course of our day. By using awareness and understanding and by experimenting with different ways of holding and moving we can alleviate pain, reduce stress and eliminate jaw tension from the inside out.

**Have you noticed changes in jaw tension during exercise and while driving in traffic?**

### During Exercise

Has your coach, yoga teacher, or a friend mentioned that your jaw is tight during your entire workout? Constant tension in one area of the body draws energy away from the parts of the body you are trying to stretch, strengthen or train. This wasted energy hinders the progress of your training.

### Driving in Traffic

Do you tighten your jaw muscles while you drive? Do you find yourself clenching your teeth and the steering wheel? Do you yell and swear at other drivers but are meek and quiet outside the car? Is all this tension and elevated emotion about more than the traffic? Does it feel safer to express strong feelings in the confines of your car?

**Following are some tools to relieve pain and tension in your jaw during exercise and while driving.**

### During Exercise

Before you begin your exercise program close your mouth, letting your front teeth touch while your back teeth remain open. It may be a strange sensation at first but

doing this keeps you from clenching your jaw. Doing your workout without clenching your teeth allows more of your energy to go into your workout and not be lost. Check in several times while exercising to remind yourself to keep some space between your back teeth and that it is possible to push yourself physically without clenching your teeth.

## Driving in Traffic

While driving in your car keep your hands on the wheel and tighten your jaw, then your arms and your hands, hold for a few seconds and then release. Repeat this three times. After doing this, notice how the level of tension in your jaw and the rest of your body has changed. Has this shifted how you feel about the traffic? What other aspects of your life come to mind as the reason for this level of distress? Can some other feelings now come into awareness?

## What about tension and stress that comes from work and relationships?

For most of us the greatest part of our day is not spent alone. While we are at work, with our partners, family or spending time with friends, we are engaged in various types of relationships. While relating we experience jaw tension that can be both physically and emotionally based. This tension can show up in the form of headaches, toothaches, shortness of breath and earaches and can make it more difficult to express

ourselves verbally and emotionally.

To change the level of internal tension that we bring to our relationships at work and home we must start to examine the underlying beliefs we have about who we are when we are in relationships with others. This kind of reexamination requires being engaged in a therapeutic relationship with another human being. The safe container that is developed in a healthy therapeutic relationship enables the old information to be brought out and new options to be practiced. We were created by a two person relationship so it makes sense that it takes two to examine relationship issues.

In this article we are focusing on the jaw but physical tension patterns show up everywhere in the body. Attempting to look at only one segment of the whole body pattern of tension is not easy because that is not how we move about the world and live our lives. And yet there are some things we can do on our own to develop an awareness of what happens in our jaws when we are involved with others. We can start to notice what situations, at work and with others, trigger a reaction, producing either a physical and/or emotional response.

### Work

Work is the area where feelings about authority and personal ambition come into play. Office politics and hierarchies can often make it impossible to speak about what you know and see.

Do you get headaches, have a difficult time speaking or find yourself grinding your teeth during performance review time? When you are in a stressful work situation focus some attention on your jaw. What is the level of tension there? Is your breathing shallow and rapid? Do you notice that something happens to your breathing when your jaw is tight?

If you have noticed rapid shallow breathing it signifies that the flight or fight response has been triggered. When we are frightened or angry it is very difficult to think clearly and to respond with what is needed in the moment. Are these sorts of reactions hindering your success?

When we are literally “stuck” in these physical patterns the opportunities for new outcomes to resolve difficult and often repetitive situations are unavailable.

### Relationships

Do you assume a physical posture or shape when a disagreement with your significant other arises? Does the pressure in your throat and jaw change? Is the outcome of your arguments with loved ones as predictable as practiced dance steps?

When your jaw is tight and your breathing is short your legs are often immobile and locked in a particular stance. We automatically assume a stance or “position” at stressful and difficult times. It is part of an old unconscious coping mechanism.

When we are literally “stuck” in these physical patterns the opportunities for new outcomes to resolve difficult and often repetitive situations are unavailable. This con-

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tributes to feeling that the kind of relationships we want are somehow out of our reach.

## **What can you do on your own with the reactions that occur when you are involved ?**

Being mindful of your jaw tension and choosing to intentionally loosen it can create a small opening for something different to happen, a new sensation or feeling to arise that can allow a new outcome to play out. As the old tension patterns begin to shift, the shape of your body chang-

es which then allows for shifts to occur in your thinking and feeling.

Alleviating pain and tension in the jaw depends on, to a large extent, our understanding the causes. Jaw tension is part of a repeating pattern of emotion and physical sensation that has become unconscious and automatic. This dynamic occurs in many areas of your body in addition to your jaw. Real change can be established by deciphering the meaning of the tension and the related feelings. This takes time and patience especially with oneself and often requires the help of a qualified professional to create the container of a safe relationship.

You can start on your own by

observing the link between what you are feeling and what your body is doing. Being more conscious of your reactions is the first step in the process that allows for the possibility of new choices. We all want to move on from experiencing the pain and emotional cycles of the past and begin to respond to life with authenticity.

### **SPRe Bodywork**

#### **Somatic Pattern Recognition**

Jill Ableson/Martha Hope

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**SPRe Bodywork, Somatic Pattern Recognition** is an innovative and effective method for relieving physical and emotional pain through accessing the layers of the body where belief systems, emotions and physical tension intersect. A SPRe practitioner works with both the client's physical symptoms and their belief systems simultaneously in a safe therapeutic environment. During most of the 75 minute session the client is on the table fully clothed. A gentle and highly effective elliptical motion is applied through each joint and body segment to create structural shifts and to allow each client to find their authentic shape and balance. Client driven exploratory dialog combined with gentle elliptical motion releases the patterns of holding in the body as the unconscious patterns of belief are reevaluated resulting in new ways of being in the world.

**Martha Hope** has been working in the field of BodyMind awareness for thirty years. She trained as a massage therapist in 1976, became a practitioner of the Rolf method of Structural Integration in 1988 and trained as a Somatic Pattern Recognition practitioner in 1997. In her private practice as a SPRe Bodywork practitioner and instructor Martha has helped hundreds of people find real change in their lives by creating a safe environment to explore the long unconscious patterns of body and mind. Her clients have said that after working with Martha their bodies are comfortable and their lives are self directed.

**Jill Ableson** has studied at the Rolf Institute and has been a certified Rolfer since 1994. Following her Rolf training she studied Somatic Pattern Recognition and advanced studies in Barcelona Spain. Jill is in private practice and teaches SPRe Bodywork. She is passionate about the integration of mind, body, genetics and psychology. Jill's clients come to her when something feels 'stuck' in their bodies and/or lives. They are often at a crossroads and recognize a need for change.