



## Getting It Straight

by Dr. Kirk Christensen,  
Woodstock's Orthodontic Specialist

**Q:** I saw an orthodontist and he told me my jaw joints would get better if he straightened my teeth. Does orthodontic treatment correct TMJ problems?

**A:** That orthodontist made a bold statement, and very likely, one that he cannot deliver on. All body joints are tricky structures, and the Temporo-Mandibular Joints (TMJ) or jaw joints remain the most mysterious. Over the last 20 years with the advent of MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and arthrograms we have a better understanding of the actions of these joints in living creatures, but why TMJ problems manifest differently and to varying degrees among individuals is uncertain. We do know that trauma is frequently a cause of symptoms, as is a person's tendency toward joint problems in their whole body. Some people have "loose ligaments" and/or are prone to joint inflammation.

The relationship of a person's bite (occlusion) to his jaw joint symptoms is often nonexistent. Some people with ideal bites have painful and/or noisy jaw joints. Many people with the worst looking and poorest functioning bites have no joint symptoms at all. So, saying that correcting a bite will correct the joints may be true for one person and not for another. In fact, symptoms may develop or become worse during orthodontic treatment. And what, indeed, are the symptoms? Joint pain is one thing, sounds are another. Mild to moderate clicking or popping sounds may be annoying, but usually don't interfere with quality of life. Pain, and limitation of movement, however, are causes for concern. Woodstock Orthodontics performs a comprehensive TMJ exam on every new patient, no matter what their age. With such a mysterious joint, we should have a baseline of function and symptoms on all patients. Can I cure TMJ symptoms with braces? Maybe yes, maybe no, but, no promises, please.

!Dr. Christensen's column appears weekly in the Northwest Herald. Questions to be answered and treatment inquiries may be directed to: **Woodstock Orthodontics, c/o Kirk H. Christensen, DDS, 226 West Judd Street, Woodstock, IL 60098, Phone: 815-337-5522**