

January 23, 2009

Dear Martha Stewart Show:

As the Co-Founder and President of The TMJ Association (TMJA), I was pleased to see your January 13th segment profiling TMJDs (temporomandibular joint and muscle disorders). I would, however, like to take this opportunity to clarify a few issues.

Although stress and tooth grinding are sometimes attributed as causes for TMJ disorders, the National Institute of Health brochure, <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/TMJ/TMJDisorders.htm>, states that "...for most jaw joint and muscle problems, scientists don't know the causes. For many people, the symptoms seem to start without obvious reason... The roles of stress and tooth grinding as major causes of TMJ disorders are also unclear. Many people with these disorders do not grind their teeth, and many long-time tooth grinders do not have painful joint symptoms... Researchers also found that stress seen in many persons with jaw joint and muscle disorders is more likely the results of dealing with chronic jaw pain and dysfunction than the cause of the condition." (page 6)

Because there is no certified specialty for TMJ disorders in either dentistry or medicine, finding the right care can be difficult. The TMJ Association advises first consulting your medical doctor to rule out known causes of pain, then looking for a health care provider who understands musculoskeletal disorders (affecting muscle, bone and joints), who is also trained in treating pain conditions.

Although the plastic guard recommended by the dentist may bring relief to some patients, studies of their effectiveness in providing pain relief have been inconclusive. It's important to remember that if a stabilization splint is recommended, it should be used only for a short time and should not cause permanent changes in the bite. (page 10)

Our non-profit organization is dedicated to improving the healthcare and lives of everyone affected by TMJDs. It's important to note that over 30 million Americans are affected, and 90% are women in their childbearing years.

We invite you to visit our website www.tmj.org, for the most comprehensive and credible information on temporomandibular joint and muscle disorders. Additionally, The TMJ Association would be happy to serve as a resource for information, either personally or in the event The Martha Stewart Show decides to do another segment on this topic.

If you're willing, we'd be honored to interview you for our website. Please let us know of your availability.

We hope this information is helpful. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Terrie Cowley
President