7 Alternative Treatments for TMD Migraines

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Alternative TMD Migraine Treatments to Consider

Your temporalmandibular joint (TMJ) connects your jaw to your skull. It is the hinge that allows you to do things like talk, chew and yawn.

Problems with the muscles that control your TMJ, called temporomandibular disorders (TMD), can cause many problems including migraines.

Migraines due to TMD can be difficult to treat. Conventional therapies include the use of medication, dentistry, and devices that are worn in the mouth. Application of hot or cold packs, biofeedback, and relaxation techniques may provide pain relief.

However, there are some lesser known but effective alternative therapies available for the treatment of this painful condition, too.

1. Prolotherapy

Prolotherapy is a well-established treatment that relieves pain associated with a wide range of disorders, including TMD-related migraine headaches. A strong glucose solution is administered via a series of injections into the temporalmandibular joint.

Normally, the body uses glucose, commonly referred to as blood sugar, to meet its energy needs. Health care experts have known for decades that injections of a strong glucose solution promote healing and reduce pain.

Most prolotherapy injections consist of a concentrated glucose solution. Other ingredients are sometimes added to the glucose that help to relieve pain and reduce inflammation.

Prolotherapy works with your body. It stimulates a healing response of your immune system. The result is increased flexibility of the supportive structures within your joint, pain relief, and less stiffness. This reduces headache pain and prevents future episodes of migraines. Some experts claim that relief may even be permanent.

Some health care providers offer you the option of having the procedure done under conscious sedation. Conscious sedation is a safe anesthesia technique that lasts for just a few minutes. If you opt to have conscious sedation, you will need someone to drive you home after the prolotherapy treatment.

Another option is to have local anesthesia. This provides numbing effects which are provided by the use of medications such as Novocain, or lidocaine. You will be able to transport yourself home safely if you receive a local anesthetic.

2. Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)

This is a portable technique you can use at home. You simply attach tiny wires to small pads called electrodes and place them along your TMJ. Your dentist can show you how to place the pads and regulate the current. The wires are attached to a small device that produces a mild electrical current, stimulating the muscles of your jaw and face. The current is very safe, and you are in complete control of the intensity of the impulses.

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2. Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)

The current helps the tissues to relax while also interrupting the pain pathways to your brain. Your brain senses the stimuli provided by the safe current rather than the migraine pain.

TENS can be very effective for many people who suffer from migraines related to TMDs, however some people cannot tolerate the sensation of the current and need another option.

People who respond favorably to treatment with a TENS unit can use the therapy as a means to stop acute headache pain and reduce the frequency and intensity of future headaches.

3. Osteopathic Manipulation

In addition to correcting underlying joint structural problems, osteopathic manipulation can make your entire body heal. Head, back, and neck pain can all be relieved through osteopathic manipulation, and the health of the connective tissues of your TMJ can be optimized.

You may also feel more relaxed and energized. Practitioners state that osteopathic manipulation optimizes the body's qi, also known as chi. This non-invasive therapy may be safely used by people of all ages who suffer from migraines.

Your brain and spinal cord is bathed in a liquid which is called cerebrospinal fluid. Similar to blood and lymph circulation throughout your body, cerebrospinal fluid moves within your central nervous system. Specially trained osteopaths are able to gently palpate your tissues and feel the flow of cerebrospinal fluid. Gentle pressure and massage restore impairments of the flow of the fluid.

Osteopathic manipulation is often provided in combination with other holistic therapies which include stress reduction techniques, and nutritional counselling. It is especially helpful if you feel tense, or grind your teeth.

4. Low Level Laser Therapy

Low level laser therapy provides rapid relief of pain. It also reduces the likelihood of experiencing future migraines. This quick, completely painless and safe therapy can help individuals who have not had success with other forms of treatment. One treatment often provides relief, however for optimal results, multiple sessions are recommended.

My sister discovered low level laser therapy after having limited success with other treatments. She used to require pain-relieving medications almost daily but now she rarely uses pharmaceuticals. When she does require them, the dose of medication needed to relieve her pain is much lower. She has found that going for one or two low level laser therapy treatments every few months provides her with a high quality of comfort.

5. Myofascial Release

Our bodies contain a fine, stretchable connective tissue called fascia. Fascia is woven throughout our muscles

and other tissues of our bodies. Because fascia is so fine, it is not clearly visible with the use of X-rays and other imaging equipment. When fascia is unhealthy, it loses its flexibility and pain may result.

Myofascial release can restore the flexibility of fascia, which results in decreased pain. You may feel better all over since fascia is one tissue that reaches from head to toe.

The gentle, hands on technique is suitable for adults and children who experience TMD-related migraines. Several sessions may be needed.

Next page: trigger point injections and platelet rich plasma.

6. Trigger Point Injections

Trigger point injections combine the use of medication with specialized injection techniques that are designed to relieve myofascial pain.

Your health care provider gently palpates your skin and locates small bands of tight muscular tissue. The area may be tender. As the practitioner locates the correct injection site, localized twitching may occur.

You will let the provider know when the most sensitive area is palpated. Local anesthetic agents or steroids will be injected into the tender area. Other types of medications are occasionally used as well.

When the muscle relaxes, the injection is finished. The practitioner will stretch the tissue and apply pressure and heat. After the procedure, you will apply heat and perform stretching exercises of the tissues at home.

You may experience localized injection site soreness for one to two days after the procedure. You may feel lightheaded during the injection, especially if you have a fear of injections. Bruising may occur, and it is possible you could get an infection due to the injection, but it is very unlikely.

While trigger point injections are generally safe, they should not be administered if you have an infection. If you have diabetes, a bleeding disorder, or take anti-coagulant medications (blood thinners), notify the practitioner before receiving the treatment. Do not get trigger point injections if you are pregnant or allergic to the medications.

7. Platelet Rich Plasma

Platelet rich plasma injections provide rapid relief of acute and chronic migraines. They relieve pain which is due to many causes.

A small amount of your blood is obtained. Plasma, the liquid portion of your blood, is extracted from the sample. Then you are given a local anesthetic for the procedure, which takes place with the assistance of a special ultrasound machine.

Using the imaging machine, your doctor can inject the plasma precisely where it can produce the most beneficial effects. Usually, a series of three or four injections given at one-month intervals is required for complete healing to occur.

The procedure works because your plasma contains growth factors that improve your body’s innate healing abilities. It improves circulation locally and provides lasting relief.

TMD migraines can be intense and disabling at times. Try using some of these lesser known therapies and see if they provide lasting relief for you.