

Who would have thought I'd be so excited about dental procedures? Certainly not me... Let me begin with how I arrived at Dr. Mazhari's office. I have had nearly two decades of TMJ symptoms- some of which I didn't even know were related to this very important joint. Until recently, the symptoms were not bothersome, and I occasionally had dentists make a night guard to prevent further damage to my teeth from the grinding. However, I could not tolerate the night guards. About six months ago, I ventured into a new office (we had just moved to the area) for a routine cleaning. During the course of the evaluation, I mentioned what were my worsening TMJ symptoms- pain, muscular tightness, a "hitch" when I opened and closed my jaw, ringing in my ears- the list goes on. The symptoms had become bothersome the last several years and continued to worsen. And until that point, I had been told the only "solutions" were another night guard or surgery. Night guards were no longer an option (in actuality, not a solution anyway), and I was not yet at the point where surgery would be worth it. This particular dentist mentioned a path to a permanent solution, that would stop and even reverse the worsening symptoms. While I was interested, I was uncomfortable with his "salesy" approach to a dentistry field I had yet to even hear of- neuromuscular dentistry. (A tip-off was his appeal to my vanity in the sales pitch...)

Thus began my research into this speciality. A little more about myself- I had once been a certified dental assistant, my mother has been a dental hygienist for nearly five decades, I most recently practiced as a medical provider, and I am skeptical by nature. So, I used my research skills (and my mother) to discover what the heck neuromuscular dentistry is. Now, when you search TMJ disorder online, the scientific evidence you most commonly are presented is bleak at best. The essence is that there is no proven treatment for this disorder. This, combined with the fact that the treatment expense will likely be an out-of-pocket expense, made my decision a bit scary financially. Did I mention I am currently a stay-at-home mother?

Considering all of this, and most importantly my discomfort with the salesman, I sought out a second opinion. Through more internet research, I found Dr. Mazhari. She looked fabulous on paper- she is a fellow within neuromuscular dentistry with over 10 years of neuromuscular dentistry education and experience, she has nothing short of *fabulous* reviews, and many local awards for excellence. I contacted her office, and during the first phone call for information, she talked to me herself. What? She made the time to talk to me, just a person calling for information? After that conversation, I made my first appointment. Thank goodness I did.

During the consultation, she was what I consider the epitome of a dental provider. In a very caring way, she took all the time I needed- for education about the disorder and the treatment. She also did something every provider (medical or dental) should be doing- she discussed not only the potential benefits, but also the risks (to include treatment failure) and alternatives. She was not selling to me. She was matter-of-factly stating all the relative information- and it was enough for me to sign up. Albeit, I was still concerned about the entire thing... Remember, I am skeptical by nature. It all made sense given my anatomy and physiology background. And, my budding trust began with Dr. Mazhari's frankness and honesty.

I quickly became excited about the treatment the first appointment after my consultation, and that excitement has not waned. We are close to the end of Phase I (diagnostic phase) of my treatment. During this process, Dr. Mazhari has educated me about neuromuscular dentistry and just how important the health of the TMJ is to the *rest of the body and your overall health*. I now believe the slow but definite worsening of my TMJ played a major role in every aspect of

my life. It was the missing puzzle piece to my ability to thrive. I didn't even know it was missing. Mind blown.

Through this process, I have been diagnosed with mild sleep apnea. The sleep doctor to which Dr. Mazhari referred me was thoroughly impressed with Dr. Mazhari, just from what I was telling him about her approach. The Phase I treatment has greatly improved my poor sleep (which I previously did not recognize as a consequence of TMJ disorder), and the positive effects have since bled over into other aspects such as nutrition, activity, and mental health. I have experienced a decrease in anxiety, and a vastly improved day-to-day quality of life.

If your TMJ disorder is affecting your quality of life to the point of sleep disturbances, I cannot adequately explain how that negatively affects *every aspect of your life*- even putting you at greater risk for chronic diseases over time, such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, stroke, and mental health disorders. Ultimately, this could mean a shortened lifespan. *Sleep is that important.*

I now firmly believe the "hit or miss" evidence in support of neuromuscular dentistry as a treatment for TMJ disorder is a complex result of patient factors and the training and skill of the dentist. In a perfect world, with a patient committed to improving health behaviors beyond the TMJ and a highly skilled and dedicated dental provider (such as Dr. Mazhari), I believe the vast majority, *if not every single neuromuscular dentistry patient*, would see great improvement of symptoms and quality of life.

I am currently waiting for my sleep device, and am so excited about what this sleep device will do for my quality of life and health- in the immediate future and everyday after. I also am approaching Phase II (the permanent fix, so to speak). Any initial doubt was quickly erased and has not resurfaced. I am astounded how much this process has improved my life so far. And, I am continually impressed with Dr. Mazhari as a provider. She is a rarity, and I now count her among my blessings. Should I return to be a medical provider again, she will be one of my ideal role models for treating patients. I have only come across a few providers that I would emulate, and Dr. Mazhari is absolutely one.

Thank you, Dr. Mazhari, for the effort and care you put into your patients, and your continued pursuit of dentistry knowledge. Your superior dentistry skills round out all the many reasons you are on the short list of dental providers I would unequivocally recommend to my closest friends and family.

In gratitude,
Emily Steadman