Maxillary Sinusitis of Dental Origin (sinus infections caused by teeth)

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One of the unfortunate partitions between medicine and dentistry is how one field often ignores or is not well versed in the topics of the other. As dentists, we recognize the mouth to be part of digestive tract and part of your body. Some of the same complications that can affect you elsewhere can manifest itself in the mouth as well. Interestingly, one of the hottest topics currently in dentistry is the relationship between teeth and your maxillary sinus. Until recently, most dentists appreciated how a dental infection can cause sinus issues.

But the trouble was that our two dimensional x-rays would leave a lot to interpretation. Oftentimes, we would try and extrapolate your symptoms with the limited information we would see in our traditional exams, whereby we could not derive a clear diagnosis.

3D Cone Beam X-rays have changed that completely. We can now look in between your roots in slices. We can clearly see how an infected root tip can drain into your sinus. This is what is depicted in this image to the left. What we can see clearly are 2 infections. One is at the root tip of the first molar, which is circular in shape. The second molar shows how the infection from a "dead" tooth, or an abscessed tooth, is perforating into the sinus. Perforation means that the infection has "eaten" its way through your bone, creating a tunnel so it can drain.

When a nerve dies, generally due to trauma or a cavity that reaches it, it creates the perfect environment for bacteria to grow. As the volume of bacteria grows at the tip of your roots, so does the pressure. This is the point where someone has the most dental pain that persists and throbs. Once the pressure reaches a level that is higher than the surrounding bone, it perforates through it and spreads to the rest of your face. Oftentimes, this spreads into your soft tissue giving you the swollen look. In your upper jaw, where the back teeth are, this path of least resistance is usually to your sinus. Once it breaks through, you no longer have pain as it drains into your sinus. It is simple physics really! Since there is good drainage, you no longer experience any pain as there is no pressure build up. Oftentimes, these findings on these 3D X-rays are coincidental. This means that you are not even aware of it. But a good number of times, you complain of this dull ache by your teeth in the upper jaw.

Unfortunately, we have seen patients have sinus surgery that does not alleviate the source of the irritation of your teeth, and the sinus issues return in a short period of time. At Esthetic Dentistry, we have been utilizing 3D X-rays for over 6 years now and are very cognizant of these issues. Here are some screening questions you may want to consider below.

- Have you had a root canal treatment that still has lingering issues over a long period of time?
- Have you seen numerous dentists and they can't find the source of your discomfort?
- Have you seen a ENT (otolaryngologist) who cannot pinpoint the source of your trouble?
- Have you had maxillary sinus surgery to no avail?

Feel free to contact us at (213) 553 - 4535 for a consultation to see if your teeth or failing root canals may be the source of your sinus issues!