

# Solutions for Doctors: Resolving ‘Unexplainable’ Symptoms

*From the Michigan Head & Neck Institute*

It’s a common occurrence experienced by many doctors. You’ve run the full gamut of tests, but your patient’s eye, ear, pain, or fatigue symptoms remain “unexplained.” Antibiotics haven’t helped. An ENT exam found no reason for the symptoms.

Richard Klein, a respected professor and director of the Michigan Head & Neck Institute, educates doctors in medical venues all over the world about “unexplained” ear, eye, and face pain, as well as sleep disturbances. His well-documented research has evolved over two decades, first in a serious endeavor to relieve his own pain and then, upon recovery, to help his patients identify and address their pain. He has found that many once-puzzling cases — which often include more complex issues such as dizziness, muscle imbalances, and snoring — have common roots.

“These are classic symptoms of TMJ disorder and sleep apnea,” Dr. Klein counsels.

Younger physicians are frequently aware of these disorders because they learn about them in today’s revised training programs (often conducted by Dr. Klein as an extension of his commitment to the American Academy of Craniofacial Pain and to the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine). “However, 90 percent of physicians were never exposed to this training because it originated in dental school,” Dr. Klein says. In reality, when faced with these symptoms, most people see their primary care physician for answers.

With sleep apnea, the throat collapses upon itself during slumber, blocking the airway and making it impossible to breathe. Eighty percent of those affected with the disorder are men who are generally overweight and/or intense snorers. Sleep apnea contributes to heart disease, cancer, depression, and other diseases. If the airway is blocked frequently and over a long duration of time, it can result in death. “Incredibly, patients may not even be aware they have it, only suspecting something is wrong by the fatigue they experience every day,” Dr. Klein says. The patient’s sleeping partner is usually aware of the disturbances, though. Sleep apnea sufferers cycle between snoring, long pauses where they stop breathing, feverish gasps for air, sudden awakenings — and a distinctive snort. This cycle can repeat itself hundreds of times a night. “Who wouldn’t be exhausted with all this commotion?” sympathizes Dr. Klein. Upon referral to his office, he arranges for a more in-depth sleep



study to detail the problem, and then communicates with the referring physician regarding the findings and a plan of action.

In contrast, 80 percent of those with a TMJ disorder are women. “They may first visit their doctor because they think they have an ear infection. When antibiotics don’t clear up the problem and an ENT exam is inconclusive, it’s time to refer them to the Michigan Head & Neck Institute for TMJ testing,” explains Dr. Klein. Other telling signs of the disorder are headaches, dizziness, eye or face pain, blurriness in the eyes, congestion in the ears, teeth-grinding, tension in the jaw or face, or a click when the jaw is opened. “Perhaps no patient is more thankful to learn that their problem is their TMJ joint than the one who is experiencing ‘unexplained’ hearing loss,” says Dr. Klein. “In these cases, patients haven’t lost the ability to hear; their tensor tympani has become strained. Once that muscle is controlled, their hearing returns.”

Both sleep apnea and TMJ disorder are easily addressed with a small, inconspicuous custom mouthpiece. As an added benefit, the mouthpiece often helps to control other issues the patient may be dealing with — for instance, a seemingly chronic sinus condition that has been unable to clear out but improves once the anatomy is correctly positioned.

“I look for all kinds of medical issues in the body that could affect TMJ,” says Dr. Klein, who knows that when working together with a patient’s doctor,

outstanding progress can be made. “I appreciate their referrals, and return patients to them for extended care.”

Dr. Klein has treated more than 10,000 patients at the Michigan Head & Neck Institute.

***Congratulations, Lisa! Many of Dr. Klein’s regular referring doctors and returning patients know about his daughter, Lisa. After Hurricane Katrina, she began collecting baby clothes and distributing them in the Gulf and around the country to mothers in need. To date, she has given away more than 20,000 pounds of baby clothes. Recently, People magazine honored her in a special feature, “The All-Stars Among Us.” Seven thousand people were nominated for this honor, and 1.7 million votes were cast. Dr. Klein is one proud papa!***

## **Richard Klein,**

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