

Take a Break, Talking Heads

After a two-year election season, your jaws are now ready for revenge

Whatever the outcome of Tuesday's election, the winner is bound to emphasize he'll bring change to Washington. Perhaps the candidates don't realize it's already here. But instead of taxes or rebates or regulations, Hyun Martin has her own techniques. "I came to Washington to change the world, and I'm doing it in a spa," says the owner of Bethesda's Be You Bi You Wellness Center and Spa (5602 Shields Drive, 301-493-4911, Beyouspa.com).

Her bipartisan suggestion: Get a jaw massage.

Whether you've been gabbing incessantly on cable news — or at the dinner table — or gritting your teeth as you listened with a forced smile, your jaws have taken a beating over the past few months. And that, my friends, could wear out the muscles that support your temporomandibular joint (TMJ). So, Martin, who hatched the idea to target beleaguered jaws after dating a den-

bliss
out



tist, designed a 30-minute massage (\$80) that targets trigger points on your cranium, neck and mouth. She slips on gloves and dives into your oral cavity, fatiguing the jaw muscles with pressure. "I ask them to clench, and after awhile, they can't clench anymore, so the muscle has to release," she says.

The rubdown ends with a few tips to help people to heal them-

selves, like blasting your iPod and yelling along to the Rolling Stones. "Open up your jaw and let out all that stuff that you've stuffed in. Otherwise, you keep the emotion in your tissues," Martin says.

If left unattended — say, through an administration or two — jaw issues are no joke. TMJ disorders can lead to all kinds of unpleasantness: headaches, fibromyalgia, car-

diac arrhythmias, sleep disorders, tinnitus, lower-back pain and even trouble breathing. Between five and 15 percent of Americans suffer from TMJ disorders, according to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, part of the National Institutes of Health. And most of those people are women between the ages of 30 and 50.

"I see plenty of men that do it,

too," says Jason Cohen, a dentist in Chevy Chase, Md., who says he treats a lot of impatient lawyers. "They're coming in, and they're already tense. They tend to be the guys that clench or grind."

Chiropractors are also witness-

Whether you've been gabbing or gritting, your jaws have taken a beating.

ing a spike in jaw clenching and jaw grinding, or, in medical terms, bruxism. "We're seeing a lot more people with TMJ issues, stress-related issues," says John Park, a Rockville chiropractor. "It has to do with all the economic problems we're all facing right now. It is more prevalent nowadays than it was last year at this time." Park also prods jaw muscles as a form of rehab and treats some cases with low-frequency sound waves to increase circulation in the area. Park says he usually sees improvement after four to six weeks.

By Wednesday, some jaws should loosen up a bit on their own. But Cohen, Martin and Park don't expect the busy season to end until sometime around April 15. Not all stresses, after all, are related to politics. MARGARET FOSTER

Vote to Put an End to Handshaking

Politicians flout public health with campaign grip-and-grins

Sens. John McCain and Barack Obama each promised a new kind of campaign, but in the end they both resorted to handshaking. Gripping and grinning may help them connect with voters, but it's also a risky proposition. Just ask McCain's wife, Cindy, who rushed to the hospital in mid-August after an "overly enthusiastic supporter" caused a minor wrist sprain.

Although Keith Segalman, a hand surgeon with the Curtis National Hand Center in Baltimore, has never

seen a patient sustain such an injury, it doesn't surprise him that someone with a "gorilla grip" managed to cause damage — too tight a squeeze could lead to bruising, swelling, loss of motion or even possibly a fracture, he speculates. What's even more likely is someone with an existing injury's getting aggravated by a firm shaker. "It could put you on your knees," he says.

The greater public health danger, of course, is the spread of disease from all of that person-to-person contact. "Handshaking can be a vehicle for all sorts of things — salmonella, norovirus," says Ann Marie Pettis, director of infection prevention for the University of Rochester Medical Center. And seeing those events where thousands gather to press the flesh is a tad wor-



Cindy McCain's arm was in a sling in mid-August after an "overly enthusiastic supporter" shook her hand too hard.

“Handshaking can be a vehicle for all sorts of things.”

risome, especially as election season becomes flu season. "It's not the best scenario," she says.

Thank goodness, a few people on the trail are trying to limit the ramifications of their hands' actions. At a recent rally, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin announced that her wedding ring sits in her husband's pocket "because it hurts sometimes when I shake hands and it gets squished."

And the New York Times reported in 2006 that Obama had started toting Purell everywhere after President Bush gushed about the instant hand sanitizer ("Good stuff; keeps you from getting colds.) and offered him a squirt.

It's possible health concerns were behind Michelle and Barack Obama's fist bump, as the greeting involves less skin contact, Pettis notes. But Segalman worries about anyone overzealously embracing the punching motion. "In theory, you could break a bone that way," he warns.

The high five is out of fashion and welcomes similar health dangers. The hug is perhaps safer but could lead to scandals involving inappropriate touching. And kissing? Forget about it. Segalman says only one culture has really figured out a foolproof way to say hi: "The Japanese have it better with the bow." WICKY HALLETT (EXPRESS)