



Temporomandibular Joint Disorder

Temporomandibular Joint Disorder also known as TMJ is a problem related to your complex jaw joint. If you have had symptoms like pain in the morning with your jaw or while eating or talking or a “clicking” sound you may have TMJ. These symptoms occur when the joints of the jaw and the chewing muscles (muscles of mastication) do not work together correctly. TMJ disorders can develop for many different reasons. You might clench or grind your teeth, tightening your jaw muscles and stressing your temporomandibular joint. You may have a damaged jaw joint due to injury or disease. Injuries and arthritis can damage the joint directly or stretch or tear the muscle ligaments. As a result, the disk, which is made of cartilage and functions as the “cushion” of the jaw joint, can slip out of position. Whatever the cause, the results may include a misaligned bite, pain, clicking, or grating noise when you open your mouth or trouble opening your mouth wide. Here are some at home exercises and stretches that may help.

- While touching your tongue to the roof of your mouth behind the upper front teeth, open and close your mouth. Repeat.
- Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth and one finger in front of your ear where your TMJ is located. Put your middle or pointer finger on your chin. Drop your lower jaw halfway and then close. There should be mild resistance but not pain. A variation of this exercise is to place one finger on each TMJ as you drop your lower jaw halfway and close again. Do this exercise six times in one set. You should do one set six times daily.
- Stand tall against a wall, pull your chin towards the wall to create a double chin, hold for 3 to 5 seconds and repeat 10 times.
- Place your thumb under your chin, while opening your mouth, apply pressure to your chin with your thumb, hold for 3 to 5 seconds before closing your mouth. Do the reverse by squeezing your chin between your fingers to resist the mouth closing.
- Massage the area by pressing gently with two or three fingers and moving in a circular motion. Massage for 10 mins on each side. You may apply a warm compress or heating pad while you massage to help loosen the muscles.
- Place your thumb under your chin. Open your mouth slowly, pushing gently against your chin for resistance. Hold for 3 to 6 seconds, then close your mouth slowly.
- Place a tongue depressor or popsicle stick between your front teeth and slowly move your jaw from side to side. Move your bottom jaw forward so your bottom teeth are in front of your top teeth. As the exercise becomes easier, increase the thickness of your object between your teeth by stacking your popsicle stick or tongue depressor on top of each other.

In some cases, TMJ disorders go away on their own. TMJ exercises may help with pain relief but should never be done when you're in severe pain. When doing TMJ exercises, start slowly. You may feel some pain at first, it should be tolerable and gradually improve. If the pain isn't tolerable, consult your dentist. You should only do TMJ exercises when you are relaxed.

Over the counter pain relievers such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen may help relieve TMJ pain. Muscle relaxers may be prescribed for severe pain. Mouth guard/night guards may help prevent teeth from grinding and jaw clenching and may help realign your jaw.

Please contact our office if you have any questions at (360) 667-5676