



SELF CARE FOR TEMPOROMANDIBULAR DISORDERS (TMD)

Jaw pain and difficulty with jaw movement are common signs of problems with the jaw joint (TMJ) or jaw muscles. These problems as groups are called temporomandibular disorders or TMD as they are often improved with some basic home care.

- **Moist Heat-** Moist heat can be especially helpful to sore muscles when applied to the painful area of the jaw for 15 to 20 minutes 3 to 4 times a day. A wet towel over a hot water bottle or a gel type heat pack can be used. A wet wash cloth heated in a microwave can also be used. Avoid burning the skin.
- **Ice-** Ice treatment is often helpful for a sore jaw joint. An ice cube can be placed directly over the jaw joint in front of the ear. Move the ice over the jaw joint for 4-5 minutes. Avoid frosting of the skin.
- **Soft Diet-** A simple rule of thumb is to avoid chewing foods that aggravate the pain and/or jaw clicking. Cook foods of softer consistency and cut food into smaller bite-sized pieces. Avoid biting off pieces of food with the front teeth. Place smaller pieces of food directly into the back of the mouth and chew both sides to avoid overloading one side.
- **Chewing Gum-** Do not chew gum. Chewing gum places a lot of pressure on the jaw joints for extended periods of time.
- **Jaw Position-** Normal rest position of the jaw is with the teeth slightly separated and the tip of the tongue in the roof of the mouth behind your front teeth. This is a relaxed position with no tense jaw muscles. The teeth should only touch when chewing and swallowing. Check your jaw position several times during the day to see if you clench your teeth.
- **Jaw Habits-** Check yourself and ask your family or friends if you have any habits that might make your jaw problems worse. These include teeth clenching or grinding, lip or cheek biting, fingernail biting, pen biting, thrusting your jaw forward, and bracing your jaw even with your teeth apart.
- **Dental Appointments-** Avoid extended mouth opening at the dentist while you are having jaw pain. Let your Dentist or hygienist know that you have been having problems with your jaw.
- **Caffeine-** Avoid Excessive use of caffeinated beverages, such as coffee or soda, as these can contribute to jaw muscle tension and pain. Keep your caffeine use to 2 or less beverages a day.
- **Sleeping Position-** Attempt to not sleep on your stomach as this can put pressure on the jaw.
- **Medications-** Over the counter medications such as Ibuprofen, Aspirin, or Tylenol can be helpful in reducing your jaw pain. Take these medications as prescribed on the product instructions.