



TMD—Temporomandibular Dysfunction

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is the hinge connection between your mandible (lower jaw) and the temple region of your upper jaw and head. Muscles are arranged around the joint to close and open the lower jaw during chewing, talking, etc. The joint itself is a capsule of fluid containing a cartilage disc (like the ones between your vertebrae) that acts as a cushion between the bones. This system may be disrupted by clenching or grinding of teeth, trauma, surgery, developmental defects, peculiar oral habits, malocclusion (poor bite), psychological stress, or other conditions. It may result in localized or radiating pain in front of the ear, clicking or popping while eating or talking, muscle soreness, headaches, locking of the jaw, or other symptoms.



To recover from acute TMD, the joint needs to be rested, the muscles relaxed, and the inflammation in the joint reduced. We recommend the following:

- **Anti-inflammatory medication:** _____
- **Relax the muscles:** Apply moist heat directly to the jaw muscles for 5 minutes (you may put your jaw under hot shower water). Then massage the muscles for 5 min. It is ok to stretch your neck and jaw in slow, controlled movements if there is no pain. Take muscle relaxors if prescribed.
- **Physical therapy:** After heat and stretching, do the following exercises unless it is painful (a minute each):
 - Open-close:** place a closed fist under your jaw to provide gentle resistance. Open slowly, and then close.
 - Forward-backward:** place your fist in front of your chin to resist movement, and move your chin forward and backward.
 - Right:** provide resistance to the right cheek and move your jaw to the right, then back to center.
 - Left:** provide resistance to the left cheek and move your jaw to the left, then back to center.
- **Rest your jaw:** Minimize the frequency of chewing, and minimize the force needed for chewing. Don't chew gum or chewy candy, avoid bagels and hard breads, and pay close attention to repetitive clenching or jaw habits while you are awake.
- **Wear a night guard:** To protect the joint every night, use your night guard or NTI appliance (it should be made by us—they need to be hard plastic, not chewy, and they need to position your jaw optimally). Night guards are also used to prevent or treat a chronic TMJ problem.