

Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Dysfunction Syndrome

Oral & Maxillofacial Surgical Services

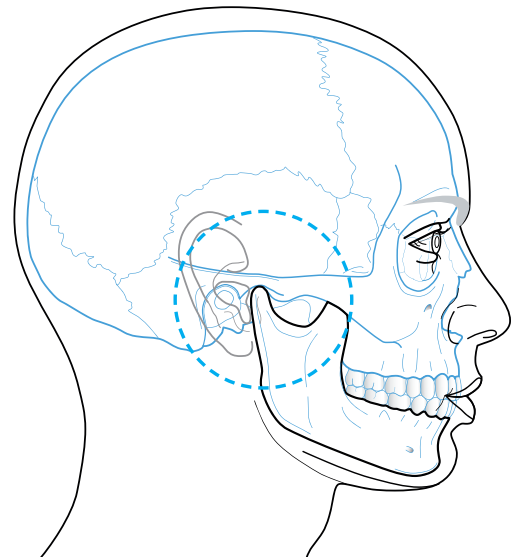
Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction Syndrome is a condition in which the bones, muscles, cartilages and ligaments of the joints between the jaw and the base of the skull are not working properly.

Other names used for this condition include myofascial pain syndrome, facial arthromyalgia and temporomandibular joint arthromyalgia.

Symptoms

1. Pain in the jaw joint which can sometimes feel like earache.
2. Pain in any of the muscles which help to move the jaw.
3. Pain in the temples, or headaches.
4. Noise, such as clicking or crunching when the jaw is moved.
5. Inability to open the mouth fully.
6. Other associated symptoms such as neck ache.

You may experience one or more of the above.



Causes

There are a number of causes and often it is a combination rather than a single cause. Occasionally no obvious cause can be found.

1. Injury to the jaw, either directly to the joint or elsewhere on the jaw.
2. Loss of posterior teeth, uneven bite, severe jaw/ facial deformity leading to increased stress on the jaw joint.
3. Habits, such as biting nails and chewing gum, clenching/grinding of teeth even during sleep, abnormal jaw posture or tensing up the facial or jaw muscles.
4. Generalised stress, anxiety or depression. This includes problems with family, exams, money and work.

Treatment

Treatment is usually initially conservative and sometimes more specific.

Conservative

These are simple measures which help to rest the jaw and include:

1. Soft diet, in particular avoiding hard foods such as toffees, crusty bread and chewing gum.
2. Warm compress over the area that is painful.
3. Physiotherapy, in the form of simple jaw exercises.
4. Simple painkillers such as Ibuprofen or Co-codamol.
5. Avoid opening wide, especially when yawning.

The operation

Specific

- 1. Physiotherapy** - This usually involves jaw exercises. Occasionally, jaw manipulation, ultrasound/laser or heat treatment to the joint or muscles to help to relax the jaw muscles or correct the jaw opening
- 2. Dental splints** - Soft splints are used in patients who clench or grind their teeth. Hard splints are used when the bite is uneven, or when there is a prominent click in the jaw joint.
- 3. Dentures** - If you have lost teeth, then you may benefit from wearing a denture to improve your bite. If your dentures are old you may need to have them replaced.
- 4. Surgery** - This is used only when there is a definitive mechanical problem which has not responded to other treatment. It is rarely used, as it is not without side effects.

Can it be helped?

In most cases, yes, but the symptoms may take several months or longer to improve.

The majority of patients have no further problems.

Some may have recurrent symptoms from time to time, but understanding the cause of the problem and using conservative treatment usually helps to settle such symptoms.

We often tell patients that it is not always possible to eliminate clicks/noises, but we can often help with pain and limitation in mouth opening.

Exercises

Remedial Jaw Exercises

If the jaw joints are particularly tender, these exercises can be assisted by giving preliminary warmth.

Place a protected hot water bottle first on one joint, then the other, for five minutes on each side before commencing the exercise.

Reflex Opening Exercise

This exercise is designed to produce a reflex relaxation of the jaw muscles, so temporarily decreasing the load transmitted to the jaw joint.

- Place the hand under the point of the chin and open the mouth until the teeth are just apart.
- Maintain firm opening pressure against hand resistance and hold the position for a period of 30-40 seconds or until the jaw opening muscles feel tired.
- When this point is reached, remove the hand from under the chin and swallow quickly in order to relax the jaw.
- Immediately following this, place a finger of each hand just in front of the ear to support the jaw joint and allow the jaw to open smoothly and widely, avoiding any swing to the right or left.
- Remove fingers from each side and close the mouth to complete the exercise.

This manoeuvre should be repeated five or six times at a sitting and the series repeated two or three times a day, depending on the severity of the symptoms.

It is useful to carry out the exercise at periods when the jaw is particularly painful, for example, after meals.

Lateral Opening Exercise

This exercise is designed to increase mobility of the joints where jaw opening is restricted. It is only to be used when there is significant limitation of normal opening.

- Support first of all the left jaw joint with two fingers of the left hand placed just in front of the left ear and place the right hand against the side of the right jaw.
- Move the point of the jaw towards the right side against the resistance of the right hand, maintaining support with the fingers of the left hand over the left jaw joint.
- When maximum movement to the side has been achieved, ease the jaw slowly back into the central position.
- The exercise should then be repeated on the opposite side, reversing the above movements.

Note

These exercises are only prescribed for painful jaw joint dysfunction. This is not a disease. It is caused by uncoordinated movement and temporary overload with associated muscle spasm and will, in most cases, get better with simple exercises such as these.

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If you have any problems between appointments

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