

TMJ and Associated Musculature Physical Therapy

A very easy warm up TMJ exercise is where you sit up straight and look straight ahead. Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth and leave it there during the entire first exercise. Slowly open your mouth as wide as you can, or until you feel pain. Repeat this for a series of repetitions to warm up your jaw muscles. This will establish where your pain threshold is. Each time you do this warm up you will be able to track your progress. Progress will be in the form of wider opening without pain and with your tongue still on the roof of your mouth.

Most of the exercises listed below for your jaw joints or “TMJ” focus on massaging and stretching the muscles of the face, shoulders, temporomandibular joint (TMJ), and back of the neck.

Total Body Relaxation

Stress is a common cause of TMJ-related discomfort so it's not surprising that a key to relief is an exercise promoting total body relaxation. The following TMJ exercise is designed to decrease muscular tension in the jaw, neck and shoulders. It is the starting point for each exercise in this program. All the *jaw exercises for TMJ* outlined here should be performed in front of a mirror so you can monitor your performance.

1. Stand up straight. Clear your mind. Allow your body's tension in your to flow away.
2. Say the word "Emma" and let your mouth drop open slightly keeping your teeth apart.
3. Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth just above the upper front teeth. Hold it there in the "clucking" position.
4. Breathe from the diaphragm (your abdominal area) not the chest.

Joint Positioning

Tongue on roof of mouth as far back as the tongue can touch. While keeping the tongue touching the back of the roof of the mouth, slowly open and close (with your tongue still touching the roof)... if your tongue comes off the roof, you are opening too wide. As you perform this exercise with more and more comfort and familiarity, you can attempt to open and close wider with the tongue tip displacing from the roof of the mouth. This progression of movements will help you with comfortable positioning of your jaw and showing you how far you can open and close (in position) without discomfort.

Maximum Opening Exercises

Open mouth as wide as possible, then place hand on chin and press to increase opening. You may feel a pull. Hold for 30 seconds, then release. Repeat 4 times each session, with 4 sessions per day.



Lateral Movements

Slide jaw as far to the left as you can, then place right hand against jaw and apply pressure to assist leftwards motion. You may feel a pull. Hold for 30 seconds, then release. Repeat 4 times each session, with 4 sessions per day. Repeat the same exercises but to the RIGHT.



Joint Strength - Closure

Push down on your bottom teeth with your fingers, and push up with your jaw. It's basically the same thing as the aforementioned joint strength exercise, except it helps strengthen the vertical muscles around the TMJ. If one hand isn't enough, use both hands – just don't bite down on your fingers.

Joint Positioning

Another joint-strengthening-tactic is to hold your mouth slightly open and aligned. Then, with your palm, push your chin straight in (towards you). You may feel your lower jaw retrude backwards to a different position.

Neck Muscle Loosening

This exercise is to help loosen up your neck muscles. It helps in taking a lot of the stress off the muscles in your face (the neck muscles have to work extra to compensate for all the muscle weakness around the jaw joints). Put your hands in an "X" shape on your chest, with your right hand on your left collarbone and your left hand on the right side. Then, stretch your neck backwards and to the right or left, feeling the strain (but not too much). While doing this, grip your hands on your chest without grabbing your collarbone. Hold this for about 10 seconds, and switch sides.

Do these exercises for as long as you feel comfortable, resting in between sets. Do not push it, do not exercise until it hurts. Try to remember to do them for 4 repetitions each, 4 times a day. If your jaw feels sore, take a day or two off, as overexerting the joints won't help. These exercises help many people with tmj, facial and neck discomfort.