

Exercises to Improve the Function of the Temporomandibular Joint

(Queen Margaret Hospital, Fife)

The purpose of the exercise is to prevent clicking of the jaw and to strengthen muscles which pull your jaw backwards. It will relax the muscles which will pull the jaw forwards or to one side as you open your mouth, and this will take the strain off your joints.

Set aside two five minute periods every day at a time when you are relaxed and when you have nothing on your mind. One good time is before you go to bed, another perhaps when you get home from work. Sit upright in a chair, and carry out the following manoeuvres:

1. Close your mouth on your back teeth, resting the tip of your tongue on your palate just behind the upper front teeth.
2. Run the tip of your tongue backwards on to the soft palate as far back as it will go, keeping the teeth in contact.
3. Force your tongue back to maintain contact with the soft palate, and slowly open your mouth until you feel your tongue just being pulled away from the soft palate. Do not try and open your mouth further. Keep it in this open position for five seconds and then close your mouth. Relax for five seconds.
4. Repeat this manoeuvre slowly over the next five minutes in a firm but relaxed fashion.

As you open your mouth, you should feel tension in the muscles at the back of your jaw and beneath your chin. For the first few times that you do the exercise you should check in the front of a mirror that the lower teeth move vertically downwards – that is, there is no slight movement from side to side as you open your mouth. If the exercise is being carried out correctly, there will be no clicks nor noise from the joints. If there is, you must be making some error in carrying out the exercise.

Do this exercise no more than the recommended amount for the first week. Initially, it may seem to make your pain worse but this will be as a result of unaccustomed exercise. Thereafter, do the exercise as often as you can and this will help to strengthen the ligaments around your joints.

If this exercise is carried out correctly and regularly, over a two to three week period, you will re-train your muscles so that your jaw opens and closes smoothly without clicks or jerks, and any pain that you are experiencing will subside.