

The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals 
NHS Foundation Trust

Temporomandibular Disorder

TMD

This leaflet has been produced to provide you with information about Temporomandibular Disorder (TMD) and aims to answer any questions that you may have. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to ask the dental and nursing staff caring for you.

What is TMD?

TMD describes a variety of conditions which affect the jaw joints and muscles. Problems may occur on one or both sides. It is very common. Many people have some sign of TMD but only a small number suffer pain.

What causes TMD?

We do not know exactly what causes TMD. For years dentists thought that TMD was caused by the way the jaws and teeth lined up. However, research has shown that mis-alignment of the jaws and teeth is not a major cause of TMD. Today we believe that TMD is caused by many things acting together, some of which may have little or nothing to do with your teeth. Most discomfort is from overuse of the joints and muscles. There are many ways this can occur:

- Clenching the teeth together. This may be brought on when you are concentrating or extra busy, worried, annoyed or even by cold winds.
- Grinding the teeth together. This often occurs at night but can also be during the day.
- Straining the joints and muscles by chewing pencils, biting nails, holding things in your mouth, holding the telephone between your neck and shoulder.
- Overworking the muscles by constant chewing, e.g. chewing gum etc.

Will it get worse?

TMD does not usually keep getting worse. The problem tends to come and go, often feeling worse during times of stress. Studies demonstrate that it does not get worse with age but is one of the few conditions which seem to get better as you get older.

What problems may I experience?

- Jaw pain or soreness that may be worse either on waking or in the evening
- Jaw pain when biting, chewing or yawning
- Clicking from the joint when moving your jaw
- Stiffness or locking of the jaw joint.
- Earache without an infection
- Difficulty opening or closing your mouth
- Frequent headaches

How is TMD treated?

There are many effective and simple treatments although there is no one single cure. Studies have shown that up to 90% of all patients will get better with some self-care, exercises and the use of a splint (bite guard) to reduce the tension in the muscles around the face. Occasionally other forms of treatment can be of benefit, e.g. physiotherapy, adjustment of the biting surfaces of the teeth or a course of medication. Only very rarely is orthodontics or surgery indicated for the treatment of TMD.

What can you do?

You are the key - without your help the treatment will not be as effective.

- Keep your teeth apart. Do this when you are not wearing your splint. The proper resting position for your jaw is with the teeth slightly apart and your lips gently together. This allows your jaw joints and muscles time to rest and heal. Your teeth should only touch during chewing, swallowing and sometimes speaking.
- Avoid opening your mouth very wide.
- Avoid habits like chewing fingernails or gum.
- Avoid straining your neck and shoulders by poor posture. This can occur when working at a computer or holding the phone between your neck and shoulder for a long time.
- Eat nutritious meals that do not require hard or prolonged chewing. A soft diet is particularly useful when symptoms of TMD are more intense.
- Avoid caffeine and smoking. Both of these are stimulants which excite the nerves of your body. If you are having pain, any stimulants can make the pain seem worse and increase muscle fatigue.
- Painkillers you would normally take for a headache, for example paracetamol or ibuprofen can be taken for short periods if the pain is particularly intense.
- Follow your personal treatment programme. This will be developed specifically for your needs by a dentist in the clinic.
- Try to give yourself 10-15 minutes each day to relax.

Remember - be patient - nine out of ten TMD patients will get better by simple methods alone.

Exercise programme to relieve TMD

Please read carefully

- Always do the following exercises slowly and gently, relaxing the muscles as much as possible.
- All movement must be slow, relaxed and pain-free.
- To be effective, these exercises must be performed regularly.
- If the exercises seem to be improving your jaw problem they can be carried out more often.
- Most patients benefit by doing jaw exercises but if they appear to make your jaw problem worse, stop doing them.
- Your dentist may prescribe other exercises depending on your specific need.

Exercise 1

This exercise is designed to help you learn a smooth and protective jaw opening pattern. It should be carried out in front of a mirror and an ideal time is just after you have brushed your teeth in the morning and evening. The jaw joint acts like a hinge and during this exercise you should only feel a rotation in the joints as your jaw opens. Make sure you watch in the mirror checking that your jaw opens and closes in a straight vertical line avoiding any sideways movement.

1. Working in front of a mirror, place your fingers over your jaw joints.
2. Curl your tongue backwards to the roof of your mouth.
3. Keeping your tongue in this position, open your mouth slowly and smoothly.
4. Make sure your jaw opens in a straight line avoiding any sideways deviation.
5. Repeat this 5 times twice a day



Exercise 2

This exercise strengthens the muscles that control jaw movement. This exercise can be carried out when you are relaxing, a good time is whilst watching TV in the evening.

Starting position

Start with your jaw in its comfortable rest position with your teeth slightly apart.

Exercise description

Whilst opening your mouth, use your hand to balance the pressure of your jaw. Hold for the count of 5 seconds.

Repeat 5 times each day.



Further Information

If you have any problems or require further information, please telephone 0191 2325131 and ask the switchboard to transfer you to the Restorative Dentistry Department, Dental Hospital, (between 9.00 am - 5.00 pm). At all other times, please contact your own Dentist.

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