



TMD SELF-MANAGEMENT THERAPIES

Your dentist determined you have a temporomandibular disorder that is often referred to as TMD. The “T” stands for the *temple*, “M” stands for the *mandible* or jaw, and “D” for a *disorder* within this complex. This disorder is usually due to an overuse of this system. We use this system for many activities, talking, eating, yawning, and laughing. When we are not engaged in these activities, we need to allow our jaw muscles and joints to relax. Many people have developed habits that do not permit their muscles or joints to relax for a sufficient amount of time. The following will help instruct you on how to reduce the TMD pain you are having.

1. Apply heat, ice, or a combination of heat and ice to the painful areas. Heat or ice can reduce joint or muscle pains and relaxes the muscles. Most patients prefer heat, but, if that increases your pain, use the combination or just the ice.
 - **Heat:** Apply moist heat to area for 20 minutes 2-4 times each day
 - **Ice:** Apply ice wrapped in a thin washcloth until you first feel some numbness and then remove it (usually takes about 10 minutes). This can be done every 2 hours.
 - **Combo:** Use the combination of heat and ice 2-4 times each day. Apply heat to the painful area for approximately 5 minutes (less if it aggravates your pain). Then apply an ice cube wrapped in a thin washcloth.
2. Eat soft foods like casseroles, canned fruits, steamed vegetables, soups, eggs, and yogurt. **Do not chew gum** and ALWAYS AVOID hard and chewy foods (e.g., caramels, steak, and bagels). Cut your food into small pieces evenly, divide the food on both sides of your mouth, and chew on both sides.
3. Avoid caffeine because it stimulates your muscles to contract and hold tension. Caffeine or caffeine-like drugs are found in coffee, tea, most sodas, and chocolate. Decaffeinated coffee also has some caffeine.
4. Your teeth should never touch except lightly when you swallow and when you are eating. Closely monitor yourself for clenching or grinding habits throughout the day. Sometimes we do not realize that we are holding our jaw muscles even slightly contracted.

TRY TO REMEMBER: TONGUE UP, TEETH APART AND JAW MUSCLES RELAXED. To relax your jaw, place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth, let your jaw relax so that your teeth stay slightly apart and keep your lips together.

5. Observe for and avoid additional habits that that put unnecessary strain on your jaw muscles and joints. Some habits include, but are not limited to, resting your teeth together; resting your jaw on your hand; biting your cheeks, lips, fingernails, cuticles, or any other objects you may put in your mouth; pushing your tongue against your teeth; and holding your jaw in an uncomfortable or tense position.
6. Posture appears to play a role in TMD symptoms. Try to maintain good head, neck and shoulder posture. A small pillow supporting your lower back may be helpful. Ensure you maintain good posture when using a computer and avoid cradling the telephone against your shoulder.
7. Sleep posture is also important. Avoid positions that strain your neck or jaw, like stomach sleeping. If you sleep on your side, keep your neck and jaw aligned.
8. Set aside time once or twice a day to relax and drain the tension from your jaw and neck. A warm bath or shower may help.
9. Refrain from opening your mouth wide, such as yawning, yelling, or prolonged dental procedures.
10. Use anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving medication, such as Aleve, ibuprofen, Tylenol, aspirin, Percogesic, to reduce joint and muscle pain. Avoid those medications with caffeine (e.g., Anacin, Excedrin, or Vanquish). Remember to always share your full health history and all medication you are taking with your Dentist, if you are allergic to any of these or have been told you should avoid any of these medications, we need to know.

There is no cure for TMD, and you may need to follow these instructions for the rest of your life. Your dentist may suggest other therapies in addition to these instructions. No single therapy has been shown to be totally effective for TMD, and a percentage of patients receiving therapies report no symptom improvement (i.e., 10 to 20 percent of patients receiving occlusal appliances report no improvement). Based on your symptoms and identified contributing factors, an individualized treatment approach will be recommended that may be revised as your symptom response is observed.