

Managing jaw joint disorders

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery
Orthodontics and Restorative Dentistry
Information for Patients

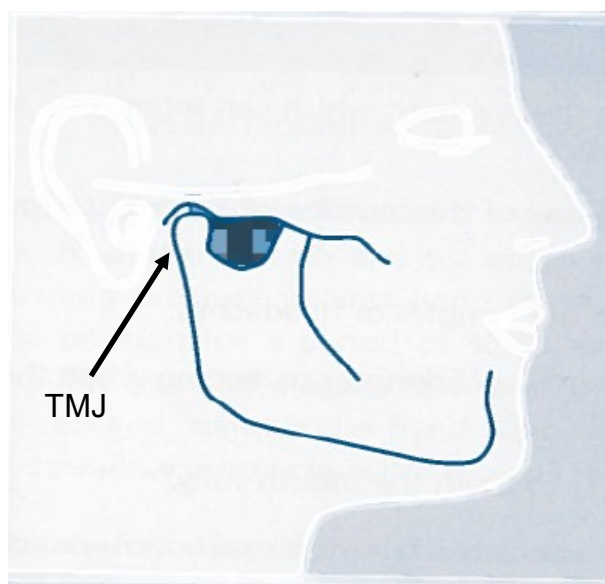
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What are the temporomandibular joints (TMJ)?

The temporomandibular joints (TMJ) are one of the most complex joints in the body. The joints sit in front of the ears, between the lower jaw and the skull. They work together with muscles and cartilage to help with opening and closing of the mouth, for example when eating and speaking.

Temporomandibular disorder (TMD) or temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMJD) are common names used to describe the problems you have when the joints, muscles and cartilages that helps joint movement, are not working properly. Other names used include myofascial pain syndrome, facial arthromyalgia or TMJ arthromyalgia.

TMD commonly affects young adults, but can also happen in children and older people. Women are more likely to be affected by the condition than men.



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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

What causes TMD/ TMJD?

There are many factors that can cause the disorder. Sometimes the cause may not be easily identified. Possible causes include:

- Habits such as clenching or grinding of teeth, chewing gum, biting your nails.
- Injury to the jaw, to the joint or elsewhere on the jaw.
- Severe jaw deformity leading to increased load on the joint.
- Having your jaw in an abnormal position, for example musicians who play instruments with their mouths or holding your phone with your shoulder/ jaw.
- Stress, anxiety or depression.
- Arthritis.

What are the signs and symptoms of TMD/ TMJD?

- Pain or tenderness in the jaw joint and surrounding muscles. Pain may also spread to your ears, side of head (temples) and teeth.
- Symptoms may be sudden or build up slowly over time. Flare-ups are often of an aching and deep nature but they can vary.
- Jaw joint noises including clicking, grating or grinding.
- Limited and uncoordinated opening of your mouth. This may sometimes include jaw locking.
- Headaches and possible neck ache.
- Chewing, yawning or keeping your mouth open for long periods of time can make the symptoms worse.

How is TMD/ TMJD usually managed?

TMD/TMJD can cause temporary discomfort. This can improve if the cause is removed. Non-surgical treatment is usually encouraged.

Treatment options are tailored to your needs and may include:

- Making behavioral changes such as not opening your mouth too wide when yawning and eating. Or stopping habits such as biting your nails and chewing gum.
- Have a soft diet during the painful stages.
- Doing things you enjoy that help you to relax and reduce stress such as activities for mindfulness and/ or daily exercise.
- Use a warm/ cold compress over the area to help relax the muscles. Then gently massage them.
- Ibuprofen topical gel can be used for pain relief, targeting the most painful areas.
- Over-the-counter painkillers such as paracetamol, ibuprofen or co-codamol. Avoid ibuprofen tablets if you are using the gel form (Voltoral).

- Jaw exercises may be helpful.
- Try to maintain a comfortable posture and avoid positions that can cause pain (like sitting with your head down). Break this up from time to time with gentle body movements or stretches.

Jaw joint exercises

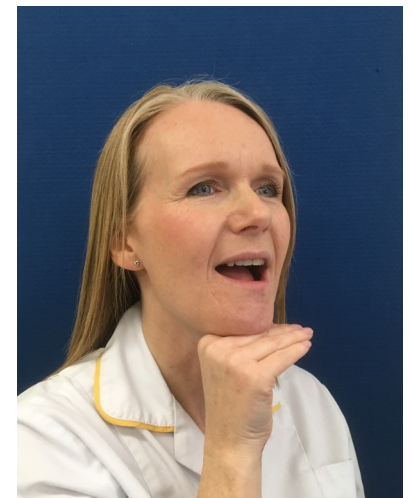
Smooth jaw joint opening:

1. Look into a mirror and 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. Hold for 2 seconds and then slowly close. Repeat this for up to 5 times.
4. Make sure your jaw opens and closes in a straight vertical line avoiding any sideways movement.



Jaw strengthening exercise:

1. Start with your jaw in a comfortable rest position with your teeth slightly apart.
2. Whilst opening your mouth, use your hand to rest your jaw on. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat this up to 5 times.



Repeat each exercise 5 times a day

What other treatment options are there?

Most TMD problems will get better on their own with time, using the above listed options. You may find symptoms settle down, but flare up occasionally. It is not always possible to stop jaw joint noises or clicking, but we can often help with pain control and if you are unable to open your mouth fully. Specific treatment options suggested includes:

- **Dental splints (mouth guard):** There are different types of splints available through your dentist. The splint works by keeping the joint in a relaxed position with your teeth apart, mostly worn at night. This reduces the effects of habits like grinding or clenching on the joint.
- **Dentures:** If you have lost many teeth and your jaw over-closes, it may help to wear a denture to improve your bite. If you are wearing old worn dentures you may need to have them replaced by your dentist.



- **Physiotherapy:** You may be offered treatments such as jaw exercises, acupuncture, manipulation of the jaw or heat treatment. This will all help to relax the jaw muscles and correct the position of the jaw.
- **Surgery:** We only suggest this if there is a mechanical problem or damage to the joint which has not improved with other non-surgical treatment. There are side effects from having surgery so this option is only rarely recommended and only in extreme cases.
- **Botox:** This may be offered in rare cases once all other options have been tried and not worked. The maxillofacial surgeon will decide if it is right for you. We use a small amount of Botox to inject into the most painful muscle areas. This will prevent muscle movement for some time giving them time to rest.
- **Cognitive behavioural therapy:** This service can sometimes be accessed through your GP. It may be helpful in some patients when problems from TMD are not getting better.

We may refer you to a specialist team at Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust if these treatments do not work. This is for more complex cases.

Contact details

- Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery: **0116 258 5671**
- Orthodontics and Restorative Dentistry: **0116 256 3525**

Contact your dentist for advice after discharge if you have any concerns.

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