



SELF-MANAGEMENT FOR TEMPORAL MANDIBULAR DYSFUNCTION (TMD)

On average, our human jaw muscles and jaw joints move 2000 - 3000 times / day with regular usage. We use our mouths for talking, eating, yawning, laughing and so much more. When you are not engaged in these required movements, people need to allow the jaw muscles and jaw joints to relax throughout the day and at night.

The symptoms of temporal mandibular dysfunction can be very complex and may mask more serious illness. Therefore, this information is **only** intended for people who have been diagnosed with TMD and are currently under therapy by Dr. Lachman.

Research shows that significant pain reduction and improved function can be obtained with professional therapy in conjunction with competent patient self-management. The steps listed below will help you learn to relax your jaw muscles and joints and reduce the jaw pain you are experiencing.

- 1. Eat soft foods.** Confine your diet to soft tender foods such as cooked vegetables and casseroles, canned fruit, soups, soft pasta, eggs and yogurt. Do not chew gum or eat hard foods (such as raw carrots, or nuts) or chewy foods (such as caramels, tough steak or bagels). Avoid processed foods whenever possible. Preservatives can affect your body's natural immune system function.
- 2. Chew on both sides of your mouth at the same time to reduce the strain on your jaw joints.** Cut all food into small pieces. Place equal amounts of food on both sides of your back teeth and chew straight up and down only. Avoid side to side grinding motions. Chew slowly and focus on equal contact of your teeth on both sides. Do not try to chew with food on one side of your jaw only.
- 3. Keep your teeth slightly apart to rest the jaw muscles as much as possible.** When you are not chewing your teeth should never touch (except briefly when you swallow). Closely monitor your jaw position for signs of clenching. Try placing your tongue lightly on the top of your mouth behind your upper front teeth, allowing the teeth to come apart relaxing the jaw muscles.
- 4. Practice good posture.** Your neck and shoulder muscles support the head during chewing motions. Therefore, good head, neck and back posture help maintain good jaw posture. Computer work requires very good posture at all times due to the prolonged length of time stationary. Try to hold your head up straight, and use a small pillow or rolled towel to support your lower back (lumbar support). Avoid habits such as resting your jaw in your hand or cradling the telephone against your shoulder.



Some simple exercises are effective in improving muscle and joint function. These exercises help reduce day and night time clenching and thereby help in reducing jaw pain. Repeat these simple exercises as often as possible throughout the day.

1. **N-Position Exercise.** This is a very effective muscle relaxation exercise. When we say the “N” sounds our tongue rests on the bony platform behind the upper front teeth. Place the tongue in the N-position. Imagine the lower jaw and mouth are hanging from the tongue and the lips are slightly parted. Let the jaw muscles go limp. Do not be concerned if your teeth do not line up in this position. You should feel the jaw muscles let go of their tension. Try to keep the teeth apart and the tongue in the N-position during the day. Studies have shown that this exercise can reduce a large amount and intensity of nighttime clenching.
2. **Jaw Stretches** Two stretches are used to loosen tight jaw muscles. The first is a regular opening stretch of the jaws where you open as far as possible without causing pain. (Note: If your TMD problem includes hyper- mobility problems [open locking], **do not** do these stretches!) The second stretch is performed by placing your tongue in the N-Position and opening as wide as possible. This stretch works on the deeper parts of the jaw muscle which regular opening stretches do not help.
3. **Hinge Exercise.** This exercise disturbs the habit of jaw clenching and helps lubricate the internal joint surfaces. This exercise is done by rapidly opening and closing your mouth. Repeat the cycle ten times rapidly. The opening should be no more than the width of your thumb. Do not open wide. Do not hit your teeth together.
4. **Heat Treatment.** Applying moist heat (a damp hand towel heated in a microwave oven) to painful muscles will increase circulation and help remove waste products from your muscles. Apply moist heat to the painful areas of the head and neck. Most people prefer heat, but cold (a bag of frozen peas) is also effective for some symptoms. Apply moist heat (or cold) for twenty minutes two to four times each day.
5. **Avoid caffeine.** Caffeine stimulates your muscles to contract and become tenser. Caffeine and caffeine-like drugs are in coffee, tea, most sodas and chocolate. Reducing caffeine use can significantly reduce muscle tension.
6. **Sleep smart.** Avoid sleeping habits that strain your neck, shoulders and jaw muscles or joints. Don't sleep on your stomach, and if you sleep on your side, keep your neck and jaw properly aligned.
7. **Use medications as required.** Use anti-inflammatory and pain-reducing medications like Aleve, Ibuprofen (Motrin), Tylenol, and Aspirin as needed to reduce joint and muscle pain. Avoid medications with caffeine, such as Anacin or Excedrin. Be aware that continued use of the medications can cause “rebound headaches” when patients suddenly stop taking the meds.