

Physiotherapy management of Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) pain

Physiotherapy Department



Patient information leaflet

What is the TMJ?

The jaw is also known as the TMJ or Temporomandibular Joint. It can be painful as the result of injury, inflammatory disease, poor postures and habits or growth disorders. This leaflet gives you advice on managing your jaw pain.

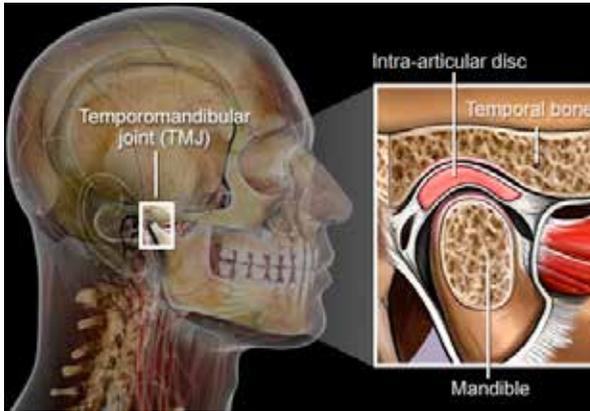


Illustration provided by
www.intelligentdental.com

The TMJ is made up of several parts: the lower jaw (or mandible) and the socket (or temporal bone). In between the mandible and the socket is a disc. The disc allows the joint to glide smoothly on opening and closing. The joint is also held in place by muscles and ligaments.

What are the signs and symptoms of TMJ dysfunction?

Pain is the most common symptom of TMJ problems, although not everyone gets pain. Symptoms can include:

- Pain in the jaw joints and facial muscles
- Clicking, grinding or locking of the jaw
- Headaches and dizziness
- Difficulty opening or closing the mouth comfortably
- Pain on talking, chewing (especially hard food) and yawning
- Ear pain, ringing in the ears (tinnitus) and hearing loss

What causes TMJ pain?

There are a number of causes and frequently it is a combination of these rather than one single cause:

- Trauma, for example a blow to the jaw either directly to the joint or elsewhere on the jaw.
- Overactivity of the jaw muscles. This can occur from continuous clenching or grinding the teeth.
- Wear and tear of the cartilage inside in the joint.
- Arthritis.
- Increased sensitivity to pain linked to stress.

What are the aims of Physiotherapy treatment?

- Relief pain
- Minimise stiffness
- Restore normal function and mobility

Advice

- Apply heat or ice for 15-20 minutes on the area of pain
- Painkillers
- Massage the joint and surrounding muscles

DO:

- Exercise your jaw regularly on your physiotherapist's advice.
- Be aware when you are clenching or grinding your teeth.
- Change to a soft food diet and avoid hard and chewy foods.
- Cut tough food into small pieces.

AVOID:

- Excessive chewing (e.g. nails, gum, pen tops and your cheek). This stops the jaw from having a rest.
- Excessive mouth opening (e.g. yawning).
- Resting your jaw in your hand or holding your telephone to your ear using just your shoulders.
- Sleeping face down, as this puts a strain on the neck.

Posture Correction

Bad posture in sitting or lying causes prolonged over-stretching of the ligaments and surrounding tissues including those of the jaw.

By learning to keep a good posture, it is possible to prevent or relieve your neck and jaw pain.

Exercises

1. Relaxed Jaw Position

Place the tongue lightly on the top of your mouth behind your upper front teeth, allowing the teeth to come apart and relaxing the jaw muscles.

2. 'Goldfish' Exercise 1 (partial opening)

1. Keep tongue on the roof of your mouth.
2. Place one index finger on the TMJ.
3. Place your other index finger on your chin.
4. Allow the lower jaw to partially drop down and back with help from the index finger.
5. Monitor this partial jaw opening in a mirror to make sure the opening is straight (tongue stays up).



Repeat 6 times, 6 times a day

3. 'Goldfish' Exercise 2 (partial opening)

1. Keep tongue on the roof of your mouth.
2. Place one finger on each TMJ.
3. Allow the lower jaw to partially drop down and back to bring the chin to the throat.
4. Monitor this partial jaw opening in a mirror to make sure the opening is straight.



Repeat 6 times, 6 times a day

4. 'Goldfish' Exercise 3 (full opening)

1. Keep tongue on the roof of your mouth.
2. Place one index finger on the TMJ.
3. Place your other index finger on your chin.
4. Allow the lower jaw to fully drop down and back with help from the index finger.
5. Monitor this full jaw opening in a mirror to make sure the opening is straight (tongue stays up).

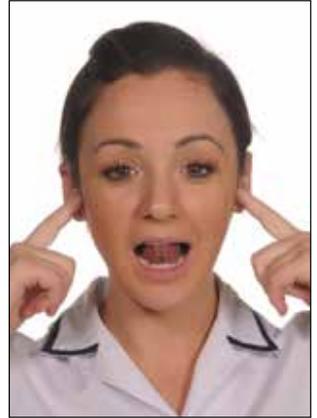


(Progression: perform with tongue dropped off the roof of the mouth)

5. 'Goldfish' Exercise 4 (full opening)

1. Keep tongue on the roof of your mouth.
2. Place one finger on each TMJ.
3. Allow the lower jaw to fully drop down and back to bring the chin to the throat.
4. Monitor this full jaw opening in a mirror to make sure the opening is straight.

Repeat 6 times, 6 times a day



(Progression: perform with tongue dropped off the roof of the mouth)



6. Mandibular Stabilisation Exercises

Maintaining the jaw in a neutral position, apply gentle pressure to the jaw using your index finger/thumb on:



Opening:



To the left:

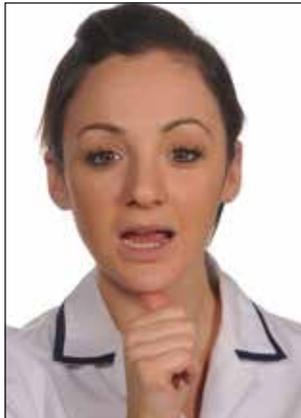


To the right:

Hold for 2 seconds, repeat 5 times, 5 times a day

7. Mandibular Stabilisation Exercises (Advanced)

1. Place knuckle of index finger between top and bottom teeth.
2. Remove it, keeping the teeth separated one-knuckle apart.
3. Apply gentle pressure to the to the jaw using your index finger/thumb as demonstrated in the pictures above.



8. Cervical Retraction 'Chin Tucks'

Standing or sitting with shoulders back and chest up, bring your chin straight back, creating a 'double chin'. Do not allow your head to bend up or down as you do this.

Hold for 2-3 seconds, repeat 10 times



9. Neck Stretches (If these are required, your physiotherapist will provide you with an additional exercise sheet)

References

- www.patient.co.uk/health/Temporomandibular-Joint-Disorders.htm
- www.intelligentdental.com

Contact details

Physiotherapy Department

Royal Surrey County Hospital
Egerton Road
Guildford
GU2 7XX

Telephone: 01483 464153

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

Past review date: December 2017

Future review date: December 2020

Author: Liora Jackson

PIN171219–1417

