

## Additional information

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

## Reference source

[www.BAOMS.org.uk](http://www.BAOMS.org.uk)

## Notes

## Contact details

### Maxillofacial Outpatients

**Telephone:** 01483 406775 (Monday–Friday, 9am–4.30pm). Outside these hours or in case of an emergency call **01483 571122** and ask for the on-call Maxillofacial doctor.

### Operation queries/changes

If you need to cancel your operation or for queries regarding your date of operation contact the **Admissions Office** direct on **01483 402734**.

### 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](mailto: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.

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# Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) problems

## Maxillofacial Department



## Patient information leaflet

## What is the Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ)?

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The TMJ's are the ball and socket joints between the lower jaw (mandible) and the skull and can be felt in front of each ear. The joint has a cartilage disc to allow smooth movement and is attached to four powerful muscles in the face. Both TMJ's move equally to allow the lower jaw to open and close without pain.

## What are the symptoms of TMJ dysfunction (problems)?

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These vary from person to person but the main symptoms are:

- **Pain:** either from the jaw joint itself or from the jaw muscles. Some people complain of ear ache and pain in front of the ear. It can spread along the jaw, down into the neck and even down into the back. Other people complain of headaches. The muscles over the jaw and cheeks may feel tender. Sometimes the pain is constant, sometimes it can cause muscle spasms.
- **Clicking/crunching/popping noises:** in the joint or ear when the jaws are opened widely.
- **Limited mouth opening:** due to the pain or muscle spasm and sometimes causing the jaw to lock.

## What are the causes of TMJ pain?

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There are several causes and you may be affected by more than one:

- Trigger events such as a blow to the jaw or a strain on the joint such as a wide yawn.
- Subconscious habits such as grinding the teeth when you are asleep, clenching your teeth, nail biting, chewing your lips. All these habits can put extra stress on the joint and muscles.
- Chewing gum for long periods of time can also cause TMJ pain.
- Period of generalised stress either at work, at home or some personal life crisis. Such stress can affect the body in different ways; one of which can be TMJ pain.

## How is TMJ pain treated?

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The Maxillofacial Specialist will take a full medical history and may need to see an x-ray of your jaw joints to exclude condition such as Arthritis. Jaw joint problems are not usually serious but can be a nuisance.

- **Reassurance:** Most TMJ pain is caused by problems with the jaw muscles rather than the joint itself. Over 90% of patients who have a TMJ problem respond well to simple, conservative treatment.
- **Rest the jaw joints:** Eating a soft diet will allow the overworked muscles to relax. Avoid too much chewing, cut food into smaller pieces. Avoid biting into food such as French bread and large apples. **Do NOT** chew gum!

- **Jaw exercises:** These are designed to relax the muscles. You may be given an appointment with the Physiotherapist who can teach you passive and active jaw exercises and also relaxation techniques.
- **Mouth splints:** These are useful if you are prone to jaw clenching and grinding your teeth at night. The splint is known as a Bite Raising Appliance (BRA) and adjusts the position of your teeth to prevent them meeting fully. This reduces muscle activity and spasm. It is a lightweight, thin plastic device that is worn over the bottom set of teeth usually at night.
- **Drug therapy:** Simple pain killers and anti-inflammatory tablets or topical gels such as Ibuprofen or Diclofenac are used to treat the pain. The tablets used to treat depression may also be used because of their pain killing and muscle relaxant qualities. Very occasionally steroid injections may be given into the joint.
- **Change habits:** Stop clenching and grinding. You may find it useful to set your watch timer/alarm to act as a reminder to relax your jaw muscles.
- **Heat:** A warm hot water bottle wrapped in a towel can be soothing. Hold it against the affected jaw joint.
- **Surgery:** Not usually required but may be considered in some circumstances.

**Remember** – It is important to understand what is going on in your Temporomandibular joint. Most TMJ problems will improve with simple treatment and rest.