



Temporo-mandibular Joint (TMJ) Pain

Temporo-mandibular Joints

- The temporo-mandibular joints (TMJs) are located just in front of the ears.
- They are the joints between the lower jaw and the skull.
- Symptoms of pain from these joints and chewing muscles are very common.
- Though uncomfortable for patients, it is very rarely a sign of serious problems.
- TMJ pain occurs when the muscles in the jaw and the temporo-mandibular joint are out of alignment.
- In plain English, the ligaments, muscles, bones and joints of the jaws are overworked, causing pain.

Symptoms of TMJ Issues

- Clicking, popping or grating sound when opening or closing the mouth.
- Headaches in the temple region.
- Aching tenderness in the jaw muscles around the face and temple region.
- Earache or tenderness in the TMJ located just in front of the ears.
- Jaws that sometimes lock open or closed.
- Spasm or cramps in the jaw area.

Causes of TMJ Pain

The condition is not completely understood, but is likely to be associated with:

- Stress that causes clenching of the jaws and grinding of the teeth (most common).
- Loss of back biting teeth wearing which affects biting position.
- Possibly orthodontics, though may help reduce symptoms in some patients.
- Naturally misaligned teeth which deflect bite.
- Trauma to the joints.
- Arthritis.

Treatment of TMJ Pain

A) Reduce muscle pain:

- Rest yourself and your jaw.
- Relax and practice stress reduction.
- Eat soft foods and avoid hard foods that require a lot of chewing.
- Chew on your back teeth, not the front ones, and eat small bites of food.
- Avoid contact sports; wear a mouth-guard if you must play contact sports.
- Avoid excessive jaw use in yawning, grinding and clenching, or chewing gum.
- Avoid habits such as biting finger nails, pens and pencils, lip or chewing gum.

B) For severe symptoms:

- Reduce muscle pain with pain killers (Ibuprofen 400mg three times a day, or 1g Paracetamol four times a day as required)
- Apply:
 - Cold packs for 10 minutes every 3 hours to affected joint in front of ear
 - Hot packs for 20 minutes every 3 hours to affected joints/muscles.



TMJ Treatment & Hard Stabilisation Splint

Treatment of TMJ Pain Continued

C) Exercises:

- Open your mouth with a hinge movement: exercise your jaw twice daily, opening 5 times in front of a mirror, ensuring the jaw opens vertically without deviating sideways.
- Exercise your jaw 3 times daily for 5 timed minutes:
 - 1) Close your mouth on the back teeth.
 - 2) Put the tip of your tongue on the palate behind your front teeth.
 - 3) Move the tongue back across the palate as far as it will go.
 - 4) Keep the tongue in this position with the teeth closed for 10 seconds.
 - 5) Open your mouth slowly until the tongue starts to leave the palate.
 - 6) Keep that position for 10 seconds.
 - 7) Close your mouth.

D) Hard Night Splint:

Commonly, TMJ symptoms are associated with excessive grinding at night. A hard splint is strongly recommended to protect the teeth by acting as a barrier, reducing wear and fracture risk. The night splint also helps reduce symptoms from the TMJ by providing a stable bite. This reduces strain on the jaw muscles, which may help to reduce muscle tenderness and headaches.

E) Referral to a facial pain specialist may be required if there is no resolution with above management.

Hard Stabilisation Splint Instructions

- Wear the splint as prescribed. This is usually full-time at night, and during the day if there are any particular periods where you notice yourself grinding or clenching your teeth e.g. Whilst driving or working on computer.
- Expect 2-3 days to get accustomed to wearing your splint, and to get used to speaking with it in place. The splint may initially feel quite tight, but this will ease with time.
- On removal of the splint in the morning, your bite may feel slightly strange initially, but should settle within around 20 minutes.
- Clean the splint and teeth immediately after you remove the splint and ensure all saliva is removed.
The splint can be cleaned with cold water over a sink partially filled with water to protect the splint if it falls.
Do not use hot water or toothpaste to clean the splint.
- If you are not wearing the splint during the day, keep it immersed in water with a little mouthwash to prevent it drying out and warping, which can affect its shape.
- For most patients it is advised to wear the splint every night unless otherwise instructed.
- Should the splint cause pain or not fit completely, return to the surgery for investigation of the problem.
- All splints wear over time and may require replacement in the long-term. The degree and speed of wear depends of the severity of the grinding habit.

Please bring your splint to every future dental appointment to allow us to check it and adjust the fit if any dental work is carried out on your teeth.