

Worksheet: Self-Care for Temporomandibular Disorders (TMD or TMJ)

Five principals to encourage healing of musculoskeletal pain disorders include; 1) Reduce Strain to jaw, 2) Practice relaxing the jaw, 3) Good posture of the jaw, 4) Progressive stretching of the jaw to normal opening, and 5) encourage healing. Here are some steps to do this.



1. Apply moist heat or cold and massage tender muscle trigger points and sore joints.

Heat or ice applications used up to four times per day can relax the muscles and reduce pain. For heat, microwave a wet towel for approximately 1 minute or until towel is warm and wrap around a hot-water bottle or heated gel pack and apply for 15 to 20 minutes. For cold, use ice wrapped in a thin cloth on the area until you first feel some numbness. Use what feels best



2. Eat a pain-free softer diet and chew your food on both sides.

Avoid hard foods, such as French bread or bagels. Avoid chewy food such as steak or candy. Cut fruits and vegetables into small pieces. Use a blender to make smoothies. Chewing on both sides will reduce strain. Do not chew gum



3. Gentle Stretching of the jaw.

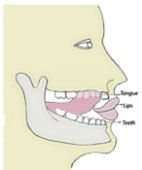
Place two to three fingers between your front teeth for a count to 20: Rest and repeat 6 times. Gradually increase range of motion. See handout.



4. Avoid muscle tensing habits that put strain on the jaw.

Never touch your upper and lower teeth together. Use reminders such as stickers or timers and if noticed, replace negative habits with positive habits such as the “n” tongue position.

- Teeth clenching and grinding (bruxism)
- Touching or resting the teeth together
- Biting cheeks, lips, or tongue
- Resting your jaw on your hand
- Pushing the tongue against the teeth
- Hard chewy foods and biting objects like pens
- Tensing your jaw or pushing it forward or to the side
- Jaw strain from musical instruments, snorkel, scuba
- Opening mouth too wide with yawning and singing
- Dental visits with opening too wide or for too long



5. Maintain good jaw, sitting, and standing postures.

Keeps your lips closed, teeth apart, tongue up in the “n” position, and jaw relaxed like a hammock between 2 joints. Sit and stand with you're your chest up, head up and balanced over the neck, and shoulders back and down. Closely monitor your postures during the day so that you maintain these relaxed comfortable postures. See handout.



6. Avoid events or activities that trigger the pain.

Use a pain log to review daily activities that aggravate the pain and modify these activities to reduce the triggers.



7. Get a good night's sleep.

Improve sleep environment by reducing caffeine, light and noise. Avoid caffeinated beverages (e.g) coffee, tea, and soft drinks. Get a comfortable mattress and pillow. Reduce stimulating activities in late evening including computer work, video, and exercising. Do not sleep on your stomach.



8. Practice general relaxation and abdominal breathing.

This helps reduce your reactions to stressful life events and decrease tension in the jaw and oral habits such as clenching. See handout.



9. Use anti-inflammatory and pain-reducing medications as needed.

Short-term use of over-the-counter ibuprofen, naproxen, acetaminophen, or aspirin (without caffeine) can reduce inflammation with joint and muscle pain. Consider use of combination of analgesic in evening before bedtime to improve sleep.