

Less Is Often Best In Treating TMD



What is TMD?

Temporomandibular disorders, commonly called “TMD,” are a group of painful conditions that affect the jaw joint and the muscles that control jaw movement. “TMD” refers to the disorders, and “TMJ” refers to the temporomandibular joint itself. People have two TMJs; one on each side of the jaw. Injury to the jaw can sometimes lead to TMDs, but in most cases the cause is not clear. Recent research suggests a combination of genes, psychological and life stressors, and how someone perceives pain may play a part in why a TMD starts and whether it will be long-lasting.

The good news is that for many people, pain in the TMJ does not signal a serious problem and signs and symptoms will go away without treatment. TMDs are twice as common in women than in men.

Scientists from the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) are looking for answers to what causes these disorders and how best to treat them. More scientific evidence is needed to show which treatments work and which don’t.

What can I do?

Until there is science-based evidence to help health care providers make sound treatment decisions, NIDCR suggests the following:

- Check with your dentist or doctor, who may have you try simple steps first. It may be helpful to eat soft foods, apply heat or cold to the face in combination with exercises to gently stretch or strengthen jaw muscles, and reduce habits such as jaw clenching, gum chewing, or nail biting. Short-term use of over-the-counter pain medicines may also provide relief.
- Avoid treatments that cause permanent changes in the teeth and bite (occlusal treatments). Such treatments include placing crowns on teeth, grinding down teeth, or using orthodontics to change the position of some or all teeth. These do **not** work and can worsen the problem.
- Avoid, when possible, treatments that involve going into the chewing muscles or the temporomandibular joints with a needle or other instrument. Before considering any procedure that goes into your chewing muscles or jaw joints, get opinions from more than one doctor, and completely understand the risks. If open surgery is recommended, such as placing TMJ implants, get an opinion from a surgeon who specializes in treating TMDs.



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Finding the Right Care

Treatment may involve various health care professionals, including doctors, dentists, physical therapists, psychologists, and others. Orofacial pain clinics at medical or dental schools are often a good source of advice.

For the latest information on TMD visit www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/tmd.