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Temporomandibular Disorders

Also called: Temporomandibular joint dysfunction, TMD, TMJ disorders

What are temporomandibular disorders (TMDs)?

Temporomandibular disorders (TMDs) are a group of more than 30 conditions that affect your temporomandibular joints (TMJs). You have two TMJs; one on each side of your jaw. They connect your lower jaw to your skull.

TMDs can cause problems in your jaw joint and your muscles that control jaw movement. These problems can include pain, stiffness, and trouble chewing.

There are three main types of TMDs:

- Disorders of your jaw joints
- Disorders of the muscles you use for chewing
- Headaches [<https://medlineplus.gov/headache.html>] from a TMD

Many TMDs last only a short time and go away on their own. However, in some cases they can become chronic (long lasting)

What causes temporomandibular disorders (TMDs)?

Sometimes an injury to the jaw or TMJ can cause a TMD. But in most cases, the cause is not known.

Research suggests that certain factors may play a role in why a TMD starts and whether it will be long lasting:

- Genetics
- Psychological and life stressors
- How someone perceives pain

Who is more likely to develop a temporomandibular disorder (TMD)?

Anyone can develop a TMD, but it is more common in women than in men. It is most common in women between 35 and 44 years old.

What are the symptoms of temporomandibular disorders (TMDs)?

The symptoms of TMDs may include:

- Pain in the chewing muscles and/or jaw joint. This is the most common symptom.
- Pain that spreads to the face or neck.
- Jaw stiffness.
- Limited movement or locking of the jaw.
- Painful clicking or popping in your jaw joint when you open or close your mouth. However, clicking or popping **without** pain is common and is not a sign of a TMD.
- Tinnitus [<https://medlineplus.gov/tinnitus.html>] (ringing in the ears), hearing loss [<https://medlineplus.gov/hearingdisordersanddeafness.html>] , or dizziness [<https://medlineplus.gov/dizzinessandvertigo.html>] .
- A change in the way the upper and lower teeth fit together.

How are temporomandibular disorders (TMDs) diagnosed?

There is no standard test used to diagnose TMDs, and some other conditions can cause some similar symptoms. This can make TMDs hard to diagnose.

To find out if you have a TMD, your health care provider or dentist:

- Will take a detailed medical history, which includes asking about your symptoms. They will want to know:
 - Where the pain is
 - When you have it
 - What makes it better or worse
 - If it stays in one area or spreads to other parts of your body
 - If you have any other pain conditions such as headache or back pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/backpain.html>]
- Will examine your head, neck, face, and jaw for:
 - Tenderness
 - Jaw clicking or popping
 - Problems moving your jaw
- May order imaging studies [<https://medlineplus.gov/diagnosticimaging.html>] such as an x-ray [<https://medlineplus.gov/xrays.html>] , MRI [<https://medlineplus.gov/mriscans.html>] , or CT [<https://medlineplus.gov/ctscans.html>]

What are the treatments for temporomandibular disorders (TMDs)?

For many people, the symptoms of TMD are temporary. To help you feel better, your provider or dentist may suggest that you:

- Eat soft foods.
- Apply heat or cold to the face and do some exercises to gently stretch and strengthen your jaw muscles.
- Take over-the-counter pain relievers [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>] , such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen.
- Stop clenching your jaw, chewing gum, and biting your nails.

If those do not help, your provider or dentist may suggest other treatments such as:

- **Physical therapy**
- **Self-management and behavioral health approaches**, which can include:

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**, a type of psychotherapy. It can help you identify negative thoughts and change them. It can also teach you coping skills.
- **Biofeedback**, which involves using electronic devices to teach you to control certain body functions, such as your heartbeat, blood pressure, and muscle tension. For example, it can detect when you tighten your jaw muscles. You can learn how to recognize when this happens and then relax your muscles.
- **Medicines** such as:
 - Anti-anxiety medicines
 - Antidepressants [<https://medlineplus.gov/antidepressants.html>]
 - Anti-seizure medicines
 - Prescription pain relievers
- **An intraoral appliance**, which is a device that fits over your teeth. Types of intraoral appliances include oral splints and mouth guards. If you are going to use one, it's important to:
 - Know that there is not a lot of evidence that they improve TMD pain.
 - Make sure that the appliance you have is not designed to permanently change your bite.
 - Let your provider or dentist know if it makes your pain worse.
- Complementary treatments [<https://medlineplus.gov/complementaryandintegrativemedicine.html>] , which are treatments that are used along with mainstream medical care. There is limited evidence showing that they help with TMD symptoms. But some providers and dentists may recommend **acupuncture** [<https://medlineplus.gov/acupuncture.html>] and transcutaneous electrical stimulation (TENS). TENS involves using a device to send a gentle electric current to your nerves or muscles. It may help treat pain by interrupting or blocking the pain signals.

If you are still having severe symptoms from a TMD, your provider or dentist may suggest surgery, including implant surgery, or another procedure.

It's important to be careful, because sometimes surgery or another procedure may not work or may even make your symptoms worse. Before any surgery or other procedure, it is very important to get opinions from more than one provider and to completely understand the risks. If possible, get an opinion from a surgeon who specializes in treating TMDs.

NIH: National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

Start Here

- **TMD (Temporomandibular Disorders)** [<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/tmd>]
 (National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/espanol/temas-de-salud/los-trastornos-temporomandibulares>]
- **TMJ and Facial Pain** [https://myoms.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Ebook_TMJ_R.pdf]
(American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons) - **PDF**
- **TMJ Disorders** [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/tmj/symptoms-causes/syc-20350941?p=1>]
(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/tmj/symptoms-causes/syc-20350941?p=1>]

Diagnosis and Tests

- **Panoramic Dental X-Ray** [<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/panoramic-xray>]
(American College of Radiology; Radiological Society of North America)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/es/info/panoramic-xray>]

- Tooth Problems [<https://familydoctor.org/symptom/tooth-problems/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)

Treatments and Therapies

- Less Is Often Best in Treating TMD [<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/tmd-less-is-often-best.pdf>]  (National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research)
Also in Spanish [https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/al-tratar-los-trastornos-temporomandibulares_0.pdf]
- Temporomandibular Disorders (TMD) Devices [<https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/dental-devices/temporomandibular-disorders-tmd-devices>] (Food and Drug Administration)

Videos and Tutorials

- Normal TMJ in Motion [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0N88Zd-Rykg>]   (National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eAK5f3D6-A>]

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Painful yawning and temporomandibular disorder: a cross-sectional study among Italian patients. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/41257836>]
- Article: Evaluating economic outcomes in the management of temporomandibular disorders: a protocol... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/41248382>]
- Article: Insomnia as a risk factor for temporomandibular disorders: a nationwide population-based... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/41243088>]
- Temporomandibular Disorders -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Temporomandibular+Joint+Disorders%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Children

- TMJ Disorders (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/tmj.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/tmj.html>]

Patient Handouts

- **TMD (Temporomandibular Disorders)** [<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/tmd>]  (National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/espanol/temas-de-salud/los-trastornos-temporomandibulares>]
- TMJ disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001227.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001227.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Bruxism [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001413.htm>]

TMJ disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001227.htm>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Temporomandibular Disorders* is the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research [<http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/>]

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