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Self-Care Program for Temporomandibular Disorders

The jaw meets the skull just in front of the ear. The joint that connects them is called the Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ). Noises in the jaw joint are extremely common in the general population. Joint problems involving the TMJ are more common in women than men. Like any joint, the TMJ and the muscles in your jaw can be strained and/or injured. The most common causes are the result of a specific trauma or the result of prolonged micro traumas from oral habits.

Once a joint is strained, re-injury is more likely (just like a sprained ankle is often times more prone to injury). Total relaxation/rest of the TMJ and associated muscles is very difficult because we are constantly using the jaw joint for things like: talking, laughing, eating and yawning. It is; however, quite possible with a little practice to hold the jaw in a relaxed position. Regular attempts to relax the jaw muscles and avoidance of activities that overwork the area will be helpful in reducing pain and preventing additional injuries.

-Relaxed Position

- Tongue up and Teeth apart, try saying “N” softly to find a comfortable position
- Your teeth should never be touching/resting together except to touch lightly while you are swallowing.

-Ice/Heat Therapy

- Moist heat for 15-20 min two to four times/day
My favorite is a sock filled with rice, microwaved until hot, but still comfortable
- Ice-5-10 min two to four times/day
My favorites are a gel pack with a light cloth over it and a Dixie cup filled with water, then freeze until hard. Peel away the paper and massage into the area.

-Pain Free Diet

- Avoid hard foods such as French bread and Bagels, raw carrots and almonds. Avoid excessively chewy foods like steak and candy. Cut fruits into small pieces and try steaming vegetables.
- Eat anything you want, as long as it doesn't cause pain or locking of the jaw
- DO NOT stay on a soft diet for too long, it is important to challenge yourself to keep your muscles strong

-Chew on both sides at the same time

- Cut your food to the normal size, then cut that in half and put one piece on each side of your mouth and chew. This will take some practice.

-Limit/Avoid caffeine- it is a stimulant and makes your muscles feel tighter

-Avoid habits that strain your muscles and Joints

- Avoid chewing gum

- Avoid clenching

- Avoid biting on cheeks, lips or other objects

- Avoid wide opening of the jaw

-Avoid resting your jaw on your hand.

-Use anti-inflammatories or other pain-relieving medications

- Magnesium supplements can be very helpful in the treatment of TMJ pain and headaches.

- Take 400-500 mg. Magnesium Citrate (which more absorbable than Mag. Oxide) every day at bedtime

-Botox can be used to provide temporary relief from pain associated with clenching and grinding. Botox can be injected every 12 weeks.

Other options for treatment of TMJ pain include

- massage therapy

- chiropractic treatment

- physical therapy

- referral to a head and neck pain specialist