

Temporomandibular Disorders (TMD)

Signs and symptoms

Temporomandibular disorders can have many different signs and symptoms that range in severity. Some patients may experience symptoms without any apparent loss of function. Specific symptoms may include:

- **Pain in or around the ear**
- **Tender jaw muscles**
- **Clicking or popping noises in the jaw**
- **Difficulty opening or closing the mouth**
- **Pain when yawning or chewing**
- **Headaches**

How the jaw joints and muscles work

The joints and muscles on each side of your jaw help open and close the mouth. These joints move in many different directions. They allow you to chew, talk, and swallow.

The two temporomandibular joints are among the most complex joints in the body. They work together in a delicate balance with muscles, ligaments, cartilage and your jaw bones. When a problem prevents these parts from working together properly, pain may result.

What causes TMD?

Several conditions may be associated with TMD. This often makes it difficult to pinpoint the cause of a particular case of TMD. Related conditions may include:

- **Injuries to the jaw or head**
- **Diseases of the muscles or joints, such as arthritis**
- **Bite problems (teeth don't fit together properly)**
- **Stress**

To determine how best to treat your condition, a thorough evaluation is recommended. Your dentist may check the joints and muscles for tenderness, clicking, popping or difficulty moving. Your complete medical history may be reviewed, so it is important to keep your dental office record up-to-date. Your dentist may take x-rays and may make a

model of your teeth to see how your bite fits together. Your dentist may also request specialized x-rays for the TM joints.

Treatment Options

There are several ways TMD may be treated. Your general dentist may recommend treatment, or he or she may refer you to a physician or dental specialist.

Treatment may involve a series of steps. The step-by-step plan allows you to try simple treatment before moving on to more involved treatment. The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research has recommended a “less is often best” approach in treating TMJ disorders.

The following self-care practices may be recommended:

- **Eating softer foods**
- **Avoiding chewing gum and biting your nails**
- **Modifying the pain with heat packs**
- **Practicing relaxation techniques to control jaw tension, such as meditation or biofeedback**

If necessary for your symptoms, the following treatments may be advised:

- **Exercises to strengthen your jaw muscles**
- **Medications prescribed by your dentist, for example, muscle relaxants, analgesics, anti-anxiety drugs, or anti-inflammatory medications**
- **A night guard or bite plate to decrease clenching or grinding of teeth.**

In some cases, your dentist may recommend fixing an uneven bite by adjusting or reshaping some teeth. Orthodontic treatment may also be recommended. Your dentist can suggest the most appropriate therapy based on the suspected cause.

Do you have frequent headaches, earaches, tender jaw muscles, or a dull, aching facial pain? Does your jaw lock or stray to one side when you open your mouth? These aches and pains may be related to the jaw joint or “TMJ”, and the muscles that work to move the joint. These painful conditions are often called “TMD” for temporomandibular disorders.