



Management of TMJ Pain

Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction Syndrome (TMJ) is a common condition affecting a wide variety of people. Here are some tips for managing TMJ pain.

- **Dietary Modifications**
 - Soft diet, small bites and no gum chewing
 - Avoid chewing and eating that hurts
 - Prepare foods by boiling, broiling, steaming, juicing, baking or pressure cooking
 - Eliminate caffeine and alcoholic beverages
- **Avoidance**
 - No wide opening, including yawning, singing or yelling
- **Relaxation Techniques**
 - Listen to soothing music, warm shower or bath, or slow deep breathing
- **Home Based Physical Therapy**
 - Apply moist heat to painful area for 20 minutes, then 10 minutes off, several times each day. For moist heat, moisten a hand towel and place it in the microwave until it is warm and comfortable to touch
 - Ice can reduce swelling in joints and muscles and reduce pain. Apply for 10 minutes on and 20 minutes off for the first 24-48 hours
 - Heat/cold contrast can be helpful by applying moist heat for 10 minutes, followed by ice for 5 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of heat and cold. Alternate for 3 cycles
- **No Tobacco Products - Smoking or Smokeless**
- **Physical Exercise**
 - Low impact aerobic exercise, such as walking or gentle exercise is encouraged
- **Stress Management**
 - Identify and reduce or eliminate personal stress

Additional Recommendations

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TMJ Recommendations

1. Put Yourself in Positions of Rest: Check Clenching and Grinding

- a. Practice lips relaxed (together or lightly apart), teeth slightly apart for 1 minute, 6 times a day. This physiologic rest position can be established by simply swallowing and allowing the jaw to remain relaxed with the teeth separated after swallowing
- b. Keep tongue relaxed on the floor of your mouth. You are learning your mandibular posture position rest. Do not stick your tongue between your teeth. That may induce fatigue
- c. Remember teeth should touch only during chewing and swallowing about 3 minutes/day if you eat for an hour

2. Practice Slow Diaphragmatic Breathing

- a. Breathe slowly and regularly from your stomach. As you inhale, the stomach moves down and out. When you exhale, the stomach will move in as you let the air out slowly
- b. Slow down breathing by counting to 2 as you take air in. Then count to 6 as you let air out and pause before inhaling again. This helps carbon dioxide accumulate in the brain and blood. Proper carbon dioxide levels determine how much oxygen gets to the brain
- c. You are learning diaphragmatic breathing that restores normal blood chemistry and relaxes muscles
- d. If at any time you begin to feel lightheaded or dizzy, you are taking too much air in. Either return to your normal air breathing pattern, or better, wait longer between breaths and do not breathe as deeply
- e. Remember slow, regular breathing should be very relaxing. It may take time to relearn

3. Monitor Head Position to Avoid Tilting: Combines 1. and 2.

- a. Find a comfortable seat, relax shoulders (slightly sloped but even), place hands in open position on thighs without crossing legs, and keep head straight up. Eyes should be closed if it feels comfortable
- b. While practicing lips relaxed, tongue relaxed teeth slightly apart; exhale and pause while slowly bending head forward without causing pain
- c. Then inhale, taking air into your stomach as you slowly bring your head upright. Pause 1 second before exhaling and bending the head forward again. Do steps b. and c., 6 to 8 times per minute
- d. Do not bend head sideways or bend so far that pain is created. Think that your head is supposed to be upright and even, relaxed shoulders and when I move it, I use both sides of my neck equally
- e. You are learning a neutral head position that prevents gravity from fatiguing neck muscles

4. Ease Upper Tightness: Straighten Rounded Shoulders

- a. Raise your hands up as if conducting a choir. Move your arms and shoulders backwards and forwards without causing pain
- b. Repeat motion slowly 6 times in 30 seconds
- c. You are learning neutral shoulder position and improving blood supply to the area

5. Take Brief Relaxation Breaks

- a. Start with 5 minutes at a time and gradually increase relaxation time by 1 minute each session up to 20-25 minutes
- b. Take at least 2 relaxation breaks each day during your training
- c. You are learning to take periods of rest where your mind allows the body to rest

6. Begin Sleep in Relaxed Position: Control Night Time Grinding

- a. Lay on your back and practice slow breathing for 5 minutes while keeping lips and teeth slightly apart
- b. Say aloud 6 or 7 times "I will not clench or grind my teeth" while picturing yourself sleeping with your mouth relaxed
- c. Start off sleeping on your back. Don't worry if you move

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