

TEMPOROMANDIBULAR DYSFUNCTION (TMD)

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Do you ever find yourself waking up with jaw pain? Do you notice increasing jaw pain or headache as your day wears on? Does eating, talking or chewing gum make your pain worse? Do you notice popping or clicking when you open or close your mouth? If so, you are not alone! In these days of busy schedules, heavy workloads and ever approaching deadlines, it is not a surprise that 75% of people have at least one sign of temporomandibular dysfunction (TMD).

TMD commonly originates from overuse of the muscles of mastication (facial muscles that we use to chew our food) or from poor jaw movement control often due to improper muscle coordination and poor posture. Education and self management techniques, taught by a physical therapist, are keys to the successful management of TMD.

Steps to decrease jaw pain:

- Soft diet. Change to a soft diet for 1 week. This means eating foods with the consistency of bananas and mashed potatoes. Avoid foods that require a great deal of chewing such as green salads, meats, bagels, apples, celery, caramels, jelly beans, and taffy.
- Cut up all foods. This allows you to eat without opening your mouth wide or having to bite into anything in order to eat it. This is important to minimize the translation of the jaw into a position that is more difficult for the muscles to control. Once your jaw pain is eliminated, you can gradually start adding more substantial foods to your diet.
- Check the resting mechanics of your jaw. As you read this, where is your tongue in your mouth? Is it touching the roof, the bottom, your top teeth, or somewhere in between? Are your teeth touching? The proper place for your tongue to rest is at the top of your mouth as if you are saying the letter "N". Your teeth should be slightly separated and your lips should be gently together. This allows the jaw muscles to relax and allows the tongue to support your jaw in the least stressful position.
- Check your jaw position 1 time each hour. Make sure your jaw is in the resting position, this will help to train new muscle memory and increase the amount of time your jaw spends in a stress-free position.

- NO gum chewing, nail biting, or any other activity that unnecessarily places excessive strain on your jaw.
- Avoid resting your chin on your hands.
- Exercise. Get involved in a recreational activity that will expend energy, alleviate stress, and improve general conditioning and relaxation.
- Avoid watching television before bed if you consistently wake up with pain in the morning – you may be grinding your teeth while you sleep. Try reading an entertaining book, listening to music or taking a bath to prepare your mind for sleep.
- Correct your posture. Check your posture at work and school as many of the muscles of your jaw and face are influenced by the position of your head on your body. The more your head is in front of your body and the shoulders are rounded forward, the harder your jaw muscles must work to keep your jaw positioned correctly.

The above steps should result in a reduction, if not resolution, of your symptoms. If your jaw pain persists, additional treatment may be necessary. We at LAPT specialize in the treatment of TMD and are available to answer any questions you may have. Please contact us regarding our TMD program—we are here to help!

If you have any questions concerning these issues, please do not hesitate to contact us at 818-905-1331.

All information contained within this article is intended for educational purposes only and should not be considered medical advice. You should consult with your health care professional for specific advice relating to your medical questions or conditions.