

Instructions for Patients with Temporomandibular Disorders (TMJ)

Success in treating your temporomandibular joint (TMJ) or associated muscular symptoms depend largely upon the way you treat the involved areas. Following the instructions below will help you to manage your symptoms and aid the healing process.

Do's

- **Do** breathe through your nose if able, not through your mouth.
- **Do** rest your tongue against the roof of your mouth for greatest relaxation of your jaw muscles.
- **Do** maintain good posture at all times (keep your head in the midline over your shoulders).
- If it is painful to open your mouth to brush your teeth, **do** try using a child's toothbrush.
- **Do** sleep on your back with a thin pillow under your head and a small towel roll under your neck.
- Do try to limit opening your mouth to a thumb's thickness when yawning, laughing, coughing, sneezing or singing.
- **Do** cut your food into small, bite-size pieces to prevent opening your mouth too wide.
- When in stressful situations, **do** utilize stress management techniques to prevent unproductive tensing of your jaw, face and neck muscles.

Don'ts

- **Do not** eat any foods that require prolonged chewing (hard crusts of bread, bagels, tough meats or popcorn).
- **Do not** eat hard "crunchy" foods (peanuts, corn nuts and raw vegetables) or chew on ice cubes.
- **Do not** chew gum, even occasionally!
- **Do not** bite into any foods with your front teeth.
- **Do not** move your jaw in such a way that it causes the joint to make a clicking, popping or grinding sound.
- **Do not** bite your fingernails, chew on pencils or pens, bite your cheeks or lips, etc.
- **Do not** protrude your lower jaw forward when applying lipstick, eating or talking.
- **Do not** rest your jaw on your hand.
- If you wear a dental splint, **do not** play with it with your tongue.
- **Do not** clench or grind your teeth. Keep your lips together but your teeth apart!

For more information: www.nidcr.nih.gov
National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892-2190

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