

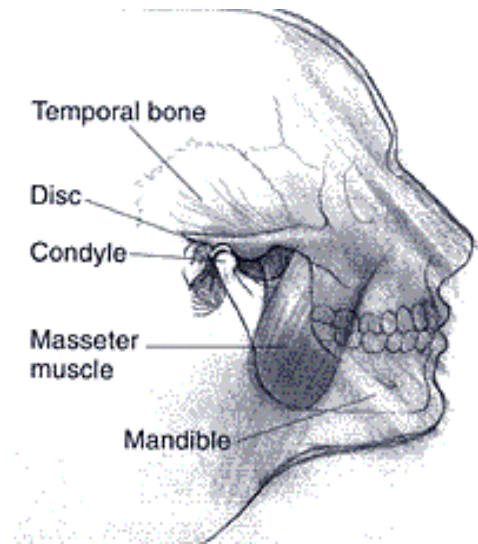
Understanding TMJ

Temporomandibular disorder (TMD) is a broad disorder referring to problems of the jaw and its functioning. It is commonly called TMJ. The disorder typically affects twice as many women as men. Usually TMD is temporary and comes in cycles. Most often it can be treated conservatively with little treatment. Only rarely will people with TMD develop significant long term symptoms.

What is TMD?

The temporomandibular joint involves muscles, the joint and the jaw bone called the mandible. The temporomandibular joint connects the lower jaw, called the mandible, to the temporal bone at the side of the head.

Because these joints are flexible, the jaw can move smoothly up and down and side to side enabling us to talk, chew and yawn. Muscles attached to and surrounding the jaw joint control its position and movement. When we open our mouths, the rounded ends of the lower jaw, called condyles, glide along the joint socket of the temporal bone. The condyles slide back to their original position when we close our mouths. To keep this motion smooth, a soft disc lies between the condyle and the temporal bone. This disc absorbs shocks to the TMJ from chewing and other movements.



The Causes: There are many.

Trauma: Acute trauma such as car accidents, a fall or a punch can damage the muscles or joints.

Bruxism: This term refers to nonfunctional grinding and clenching of the teeth often done while sleeping.

Stress: Emotional stress often plays an integral role in the development of TMD. Stress increases both the severity and duration of bruxism while asleep. Also, many will subconsciously clench and/or grind their teeth more while awake during times of stress.

Diseases: Degenerative conditions such as osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis may contribute to the condition.

Posture: How you sit at your job or computer may thrust your chin forward and strain the jaw and neck muscles.

Bad Bite: Recent research disputes the fact that a bad bite (malocclusion) can cause TMD.

The Symptoms: They can vary and may include:

- Pain in the joint or chewing muscles
- Limited movement or locking of the jaw
- Pain radiating to neck, face or shoulders
- Painful clicking or popping in the jaw joint when opening or closing the mouth
- Vague tooth soreness
- Sensitive teeth
- Ear pain

continued

Understanding TMJ *continued*

The Treatments

The key words to keep in mind about TMD treatment are “conservative” and “reversible”. Because most TMD problems are temporary and do not get worse, simple treatment is all that is usually needed to relieve discomfort. Self-care practices, for example, eating soft foods, applying heat or ice packs, and avoiding extreme jaw movements (such as wide yawning, loud singing and gum chewing) are useful in easing TMD symptoms. Other techniques for managing symptoms are: breathe through your nose, not your mouth, rest your tongue against the roof of your mouth, brush with a child’s size toothbrush, and cut your food into small pieces. Also avoid foods that require prolonged chewing or are hard or crunchy, avoiding gum chewing and biting finger nails or chewing on pencils, etc. It also helps to avoid resting your jaw on your hands.

Learning special techniques for relaxing and reducing stress may also help patients deal with pain that often comes with TMD problems.

Other conservative, reversible treatments include physical therapy, which focuses on gentle muscle stretching and relaxing exercises, and correct posture.

Short-term use of anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen or naprosyn may also help.

Your dentist may recommend an oral appliance, also called a splint or bite plate, which is a plastic guard that fits over the upper or lower teeth. The splint, which eases muscle tension, can help reduce clenching or grinding.

The conservative, reversible treatments described are useful for temporary relief of pain and muscle spasm - - they are not “cures” for TMD. If symptoms continue over time or come back often check with your doctor.

Surgical treatments are often irreversible and should be avoided where possible. When such treatment is necessary, be sure to have the doctor explain to you, in words you can understand, the reason for the treatment, the risks involved, and other types of treatment that may be available.

Scientists have learned that certain irreversible treatments, such as surgical replacement of jaw joints with artificial implants, may cause severe pain and permanent jaw damage. Some of these devices may fail to function properly or may break apart in the jaw over time. *Before undergoing any surgery on the jaw joint, it is very important to get other, independent opinions.*

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Clinic Nurse **643-7197** for advice