

EAR, NOSE, THROAT & ALLERGY CENTER

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TMJ or TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT DISORDER

Temporomandibular joint disorder (TMJD, TMJ), or TMJ syndrome, is a term referring to acute or chronic inflammation of the temporomandibular joint, which connects the jaw to the skull. The disorder and resultant dysfunction can result in significant pain and impairment. Because the disorder transcends the The temporomandibular joint is susceptible to many of the conditions that affect other joints in the body, including , arthritis, trauma, dislocation, and developmental anomalies.

It should be considered that there are many symptom of TMJ disorder. Everyone is different, therefore the disorder can and does manifest itself in a variety of ways. Although this is by no means an exclusive list, the following are symptoms a patient with TMJ disorder might experience.

Eye Pain and Eye Problems:

- Bloodshot eyes
- Blurring of vision
- Eye pain above, below and behind eye
- Pressure behind eyes
- Light sensitivity
- Watering of the eyes

Head Pain, Headache Problems, Facial Pain:

- Migraines
- Forehead pain
- Cluster headaches
- "Sinus Type" headache
- Hair and/or scalp painful or sensitive to touch
- Headaches at the back of the head, with or without shooting pain

Teeth and Gum Problems:

- Clenching during the day or at night
- Grinding teeth at night (bruxism)
- Tooth pain
- Sensitive teeth

Mouth, Face, Cheek, and Chin Problems:

- Discomfort or pain to any of these areas
- Pain in cheek muscles
- Uncontrollable tongue movements
- Jaw and Jaw Joint Problems
- Limited opening
- Inability to open the jaw smoothly or evenly
- Jaw deviates to one side when opening

- Inability to find the correct bite with teeth
- Clicking or popping jaw joints
- Uncontrollable jaw movements

Ear Pain, Ear Problems:

- Hissing, buzzing, ringing, or roaring sounds
- Diminished hearing
- Clogged, "stuffy", itchy ears
- Feeling of fullness
- Ear pain without infection
- Balance problems, vertigo, dizziness

Throat Problems:

- Swallowing difficulties
- Tightness of throat
- Sore throat with no infection
- Voice fluctuations
- Laryngitis
- Tongue Pain

Neck and Shoulder Problems:

- Neck pain
- Tired, sore neck problems
- Shoulder aches
- Back pain (upper and lower)
- Arm and finger tingling, numbness, and/or pain
- Stiffness

Treatment

There is no known "cure" for TMJ disorder, so therapies focus on alleviating pain and improving function. The National Institute of Health recommends that conservative, non-invasive therapies be exhausted before any invasive or surgical treatments are attempted. Many doctors will give you a self-care regimen to do at home that will help with any pain. However, if conservative therapies do not alleviate your pain, or your function is extremely limited, more aggressive treatment may be necessary.

Treatment for TMJ disorder can vary depending on what type of doctor is seen. A dentist often focuses on the relationship between your teeth and jaw, to see if a malocclusion (incorrect bite) is contributing to symptoms. He or she might make a splint, which covers and protects your teeth if you grind (brux) at night, helps to guide your bite in the right direction, or attempts to recapture a disc. There are many types of splints, all with different functions. The type of splint the doctor uses depends on your specific symptoms.

What Doctors Treat TMJ Disorder?

Since TMJ disorder patients have many different symptoms, treatment can include several different physicians of varying specialties. Headaches can be treated by a neurologist, ear pain can be evaluated by an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist, and pain can be treated by a pain management specialist. A dentist may utilize splints to correct bite issues; an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon (OMS) can assist with both surgical and non-surgical interventions. Other healthcare providers that may form part of a patient's care team can include Physiotherapists, Acupuncturists, Chiropractors, Osteopaths, Orthodontists, Nutritionists,

Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Massage Therapists, and the family doctor (PCP or GP).

Self-Care for TMJ Disorder

Treatment for TMJ can vary from simple, self-care to complicated surgical procedures. It is very important when seeking TMD treatment that the patient exhausts all conservative options before moving on to invasive treatments. When you first believe that you may have a temporomandibular joint problem, there are things that you can do at home to relieve your pain, such as:

- Eating soft foods such as yogurt, eggs, cereal, oatmeal, etc. to give your joints a rest. Avoid hard, crunchy foods (raw vegetables, chips, nuts), chewy foods (hard rolls, bagels, gum), and large foods that force you to open your mouth wide (hamburgers, big sandwiches, hot dogs, etc.).
- Moist heat or cold packs – If both are used, apply ice first, then do gentle stretching as directed by your physician, and apply heat. You can make your own heating pack by either wetting a washcloth or towel and microwaving it, or putting rice in a tube sock and microwaving that.
- Take Medications – Try over-the-counter medications such as Ibuprofen or Naproxen. (PLEASE NOTE: Most, if not all medications have the potential to produce side-effects. Please ensure you exercise caution when taking any medication and if you experience any side effects, you should stop taking the medication immediately and seek professional help. Always read the label and use medication only as directed.)
- Avoid yawning widely, resting your chin on your hand, resting the phone on your shoulder, or excessive talking. Try and practice good posture.
- Be aware of clenching and grinding – Try to keep your lips together and teeth apart. If necessary, set an alarm for every ten to fifteen minutes and check to make sure you are not clenching or grinding. This will become a habit.
- Try to avoid situations that are known to cause you to feel stressed or emotionally traumatized, since this can exacerbate symptoms (many people clench or grind their teeth when under stress). Some people go through stressful situations prior to developing TMJ disorder, but there is definitely a physiological factor involved as well. This point has been debated by patients and physicians for many years. Some patients do not believe that emotional factors play a large part in their disorder, while others do. More research needs to be completed regarding this issue.
- Gentle exercise, relaxation techniques, and meditation are helpful with pain. There are many websites and books that can help to teach you these techniques. Some patients have found that Yoga or Pilates is helpful as well.
- Proper Sleep & Diet. You would be surprised how much proper sleep and diet helps with pain. Depriving your body of much needed sleep can have negative effects.