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Patient Information on Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Exercises

Who is this information for?

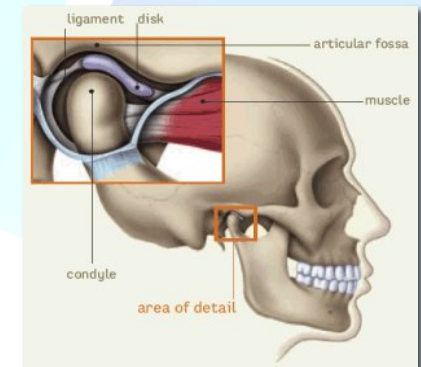
This information is for patients, families and carers who have been advised to perform TMJ exercises.

What is the temporomandibular joint?

- The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is located in front of the ear where the skull and lower jaw (mandible) meet.
- The TMJ is a modified hinge joint and is the most constantly used joint in the body. The round upper end of the lower jaw, or the moveable part of the joint, is called the condyle; the socket is called the articular fossa.
- Between the condyle and the fossa is a disk of cartilage that acts as a cushion to absorb stress and allow the condyles to move easily when the mouth opens and closes.
- If this joint does not move effectively it is called TMJ dysfunction.

What are the symptoms and causes of TMJ dysfunction?

- TMJ disorders are quite common and have a variety of symptoms. Patients may complain of earache, headache or difficulty opening their mouth. They may also complain of clicking or grating sounds and feel pain when opening and closing their mouth.
- The causes of TMJ dysfunction are varied:
 - arthritis
 - injury
 - grinding teeth at night (bruxism)
 - displacement or dislocation of the cartilage disk between the jawbone and the socket



What can I do to help improve the dysfunction and ease TMJ pain?

- Massage your muscles
- Avoid foods that are hard to chew
- Exercises to relax your jaw and face
- Practice good posture
- Use a hot or cold pack on the face
- Wear a mouth guard or splint, which helps if you clench your jaw or grind your teeth, particularly at night

What exercises can I do to improve my jaw function?

- The purpose of these exercises is to prevent clicking of the jaw joints and to strengthen the muscles that pull the jaw backwards. This will relax the muscles that close the mouth, and will prevent those muscles that pull the jaw forwards from side to side from functioning. The jaw will act more like a hinge, reducing strain.
- As an addition to the TMJ exercises, some health practitioners may prescribe anti-inflammatory medication to help your jaws relax

Exercises

Set aside 2 x five minute periods each day at a time when you are relaxed – eg just before you get up or go to bed. Sit upright in a chair to perform all the following manoeuvres:

- Close your mouth and make sure that your teeth are touching but do not 'clench' your teeth, resting the tip of your tongue on your palate, just behind the upper front teeth.
- Run the tip of your tongue backwards towards your soft palate as far as it will go, keeping your teeth together.
- Force your tongue back to maintain contact with the soft palate and slowly open your mouth until you feel your tongue being pulled away. Do not open your mouth any further. Stay in this position for five seconds, then close your mouth and relax.
- Repeat this whole procedure slowly but firmly, for the next five minutes.
- As you open your mouth you should feel tension in the back of your neck and under your chin. The first few times you perform the exercise you should do it by checking in a mirror that the teeth move vertically downwards and do not deviate to either side.
- If the exercises are being performed correctly, there will be no clicks or noises from the joints. If there is, restart the exercise and continue practicing until it is click-free.
- Do not do this exercise more than recommended for the first week – five minutes, twice a day for a week. Thereafter, do the exercises as often as you can. This will help strengthen the ligaments around your jaw and relax the muscles that close your mouth.

- You may find that the pain is worse for a while at first; this is because you are unaccustomed to the movement – over time this will subside.
- After doing 2-3 weeks of the exercises you will find that the muscles will be retrained and your jaw will open and close smoothly without any clicking.

What other things do I need to remember?

- Never bite your fingernails
- Never bite your lower lip
- Avoid biting on your front teeth
- Keep your upper and lower jaw teeth apart when at rest

Concerns or questions?

You can contact your ENT Specialist at the Melbourne ENT Group (MEG):

- Phone: 1300- 952-808
- Email: admin@melbentgroup.com.au
- Website: www.melbentgroup.com.au



Assessment by Orthodontist, dentist or Oral Maxillo-facial Surgeon is also recommended. Your GP is also the best contact for ongoing care and concerns.