

TMJ Dysfunction

Home Care Instructions

Success in treatment of a TMJ (Temporomandibular Joint) disorder is dependent on YOUR daily control of the problem. The following suggestions are to be followed each day unless specified:

SOFT DIET

During acute periods of pain, your jaw should be put on "rest and relaxation". An intentional soft diet may be particularly helpful (i.e., babyfood, soup, milkshakes, eggs, jello, etc.). When the symptoms start to improve you may begin to eat more substantial foods, cut into small bite-sized pieces. Do not open your mouth any wider than necessary. DO NOT eat hard bread, tough meat, hard raw vegetables, or any other food that requires prolonged chewing. Most importantly, NO GUM CHEWING.

MOIST HEAT

Moist heat applied to the area around a painful muscle provides more relief than dry heat. Fill a wash basin with water as hot as the skin can stand and soak two (2) large towels. Take one towel out, wring it out, and apply it to the painful area (wrap it around the front of the neck with the ends on either sides of the jaw joint). When the towel cools off, apply the second towel. This procedure should be carried out for twenty (20) minutes, three (3) times each day, allowing at least twenty (20) minute breaks between applications.

COLD

Application of cold is frequently helpful for acutely painful joint conditions. A small ice pack may be placed directly over the joint for up to fifteen (15) minutes. If this worsens the pain, discontinue immediately. Painful muscle conditions may be alleviated by following the "moist heat treatment" with quick strokes over the muscle with an ice cube. Then warm the area with your hand, and repeat with the ice cube. Light massage may be attempted at this time.

MEDICATIONS

A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID), such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn) is the drug of choice for any joint inflammation. The doctor will make a specific dosage recommendation for this medication. If your condition warrants a stronger medication, the doctor will prescribe a different type of medication, which MUST be taken exactly as directed.

DISENGAGEMENT OF THE TEETH

To achieve long-lasting relief from TMJ problems, it is essential that all clenching and grinding of the jaws be completely eliminated. One of the most important steps in breaking the habit of clenching is to learn to control the position of the teeth. You must make a conscious effort to separate your teeth at the same time you keep your lips closed. Repeat to yourself several times a day: "Lips together and teeth apart". This simple step will help relax the muscles that become tense and taut. This will also help permit a more normal positioning of the jaw joints. Remember, the teeth should actually never touch. Even when you are eating, there is food between your teeth.

Since yawning can place a strain on the joints and muscles, excessive yawning should be controlled with a closed fist placed beneath the lower jaw. This will provide resistance and stabilize the jaw when yawning.

Oral habits such as biting pens, fingernails, or other objects may aggravate the muscles and joints. Eliminating these habits will aid significantly in the improvement of your condition.

As a follow-up therapy, Dr. DeSanti may prescribe a habit appliance, such as a night guard, to help with unconscious nighttime grinding or clenching of teeth.