

Jaw, Mouth and Face Problems (TMD)

Temporomandibular Disorder (TMD or TMJ Disorder) is a very common problem. Around 70% of the population may experience some jaw symptoms from time to time. These problems can vary from mildly uncomfortable to excruciating and can involve jaw restrictions, clicking and locking. Pain from the TMJ may be experienced in the jaw joint, jaw bone, jaw muscles, teeth, temple region, ears and neck. It can also be a significant cause of headache. TMJ disorders can interfere with normal daily activities like eating, talking, laughing, yawning etc.

The TMJ is a complex joint that allows a range of movements of the jaw including forward, backward, side to side, up and down. The TMJ is supported by a network of muscles, ligaments and a disc that help guide and restrict the available movements. All these elements need to work together in harmony to optimise jaw function.

Common Presentations of TMJ Disorder

- Pain in the jaw joint and/or muscles
- Pain in the neck and temple region
- Tooth pain or pain along the jaw or gum line
- Headache
- Swelling over the TMJ and cheeks
- Restricted jaw movement
- Deviation in movement of the jaw
- Jaw locking, clunking or grating
- Ear pain, tinnitus (ringing in the ears)

What Causes TMD?

- Trauma to the jaw or whiplash injury
- Surgical procedures to the mouth, throat, stomach or lengthy dental procedures
- Clenching or grinding the teeth (bruxism)
- Mal-occlusion (the upper and lower teeth not meeting properly)
- Missing teeth
- Arthritis and degenerative changes in the TMJ
- Postural issues – particularly neck posture
- Dislocation or pinching of the disc of the TMJ
- Mal-tracking of the jaw joint due to muscle imbalances

Treatment of TMD

An accurate assessment of the TMJ Disorder is essential in effective treatment and management of the pain and dysfunction. With effective treatment TMJ Disorders can settle quickly and give lasting relief, even if the pain has been present for an extended period of time. Treatment by a physiotherapist usually involves muscle release, gentle joint mobilisation, stretches and exercises to strengthen weak areas. Due to the TMJ's close association with the upper neck joints and its commonality through the Trigemino-cervical nucleus in the brainstem, effective treatment will usually involve assessment and treatment of the neck.

With physiotherapy treatment TMD sufferers will usually see significant relief of their symptoms within 3 to 6 weeks. Your physiotherapist may also refer you to your dentist for a night splint to assist in reducing the strain on your TMJ caused by clenching or grinding your teeth.

Self Help

If you suffer from TMJ Disorder there are things you can do to help decrease the pain until you are able to visit your local Proactive Physiotherapist

- Limit nail biting, chewing gum, clenching and grinding teeth
- Teeth should be 2-3mm apart with tongue on the roof of the mouth in a resting position
- Avoid sleeping on your stomach
- Do not rest your chin on your hands
- Avoid hard, tough or crunchy foods
- Cut food into small pieces
- Ensure your posture is correct

This resource is provided by Proactive Physiotherapy Ph:40536222

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