

What can you do?

You are the key – without your help treatment will not be as effective.

- Don't worry, there is nothing seriously wrong with you and the anxiety can actually make things worse.
- Keep your teeth apart. Do this when you are not wearing your splint. The proper resting position for your jaw is with the teeth slightly apart and your tongue resting gently on the floor of your mouth. This allows your jaw joints and muscles time to rest and heal. Your teeth should only touch during chewing. Avoid opening your mouth very wide.
- Avoid habits like chewing your fingernails or gum.
- Avoid straining your neck and shoulders by poor posture. This can occur when working at a computer or holding the phone between your neck and shoulder for a long time.
- Eat nutritious meals that do not require hard or prolonged chewing.
- Avoid caffeine and smoking. Both of these are stimulants that excite the nerves
- of your body. If you are having pain, any stimulants can make the pain seem worse and increase muscle fatigue.
- Try and give yourself 10-15 minutes each day to relax.

Remember – be patient – 9 out of 10 TMJ patients will get better by simple methods alone.



HETTON DENTAL PRACTICE

TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT DISORDERS

A guide for patients

J L Gamon and Associates
Hetton Dental Practice
84 Station Road
Hetton le Hole
Tyne and Wear
DH5 9JB
(0191) 5262589

Pain in the temporomandibular joint (TMJ or jaw joint) is very common and can occur at any age. Although painful, it is very rare for it to be caused by any serious disease. The signs and symptoms of TMJ disorders may include:

- Jaw pain or aching that may be worse either on waking or in the evening.
- Jaw pain when biting, chewing or yawning.
- Earache without an infection
- Clicking and stiffness from the jaw joint when moving the jaw.
- Difficulty opening and closing the mouth.
- Frequent headaches.

What causes TMJ disorders?

Most TMJ problems arise owing to overuse of the joints and muscles. There are many ways this can occur:

- Clenching the teeth together. This may be brought on when you are concentrating or busy, worried, annoyed or even by cold winds.
- Grinding teeth together. This often occurs at night but can also be during the day.
- Straining the joints and muscles by chewing pencils, chewing gum, biting nails or holding the telephone between your neck and shoulder.
- Not having sufficient back teeth to chew on.

Some of these habits are precipitated by stress. People who are suffering from stress are more sensitive to pain. Stress and anxiety also cause muscle tension – especially in the muscles of the face and neck and this can lead to those areas quickly becoming tender and sore.

How are TMJ disorders treated?

Your dentist will ask a number of questions to see what may be causing your pain. You may need to be sent for a special x-ray of your jaw joint to aid the diagnosis.

Once the diagnosis has been made, there are various treatments that may be recommended to you:

- Bite guard (splint) to help relax the muscles of the jaw and face and rest the joint.
- Special exercises to restore muscle co-ordination.
- Physiotherapy to help with the pain and the clicking.
- Painkillers – tablets or cream – you will be advised on the most suitable.
- Only occasionally is surgery indicated.