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# Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

# Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction (TMD)

## WHAT IS THE TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT?

The temporomandibular joint (jaw joint) is located just in front of the ear where the skull and lower jaw (mandible) meet.

Movement of this joint allows the mouth to open. If you place the palms of your hands on your face in front of your ears and open your mouth you will feel the joint moving.

## WHAT IS TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT DYSFUNCTION (TMD)?

This is a common condition which affects a large number of different people. In this condition overuse of the jaw joint causes pain in the jaw joint itself and/or in the muscles which support and move the jaw. There is often a general ache in front of the ear and/or in the muscles of the jaw joint. Discomfort is often made worse by chewing or opening wide. Sometimes discomfort can be worse in the morning, especially if you have a clenching or grinding habit. You may experience noises from the jaw joint such as clicking, cracking or a crunching/grinding noise.

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### Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty.

If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email [asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net](mailto:asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net). If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any problems which cannot be dealt with as above then please contact our department on:

**01932 872000** extension **2493** (St. Peter's)  
**01784 884009** (Ashford)

Additional information regarding this procedure can also be found by logging on to <http://www.baoms.org.uk/sitemap.asp?id=20>

### Useful web links:

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research  
[patient.co.uk](http://patient.co.uk)

## HOW AM I OVERUSING MY JAW JOINT?

The most common causes of over-use of the jaw are clenching and grinding habits which occur at night. As these habits tend to occur when you are fast asleep, you may be completely unaware of them.

Your clinician may notice signs of a clenching or grinding habit on examination of your mouth.

Occasionally some people can even clench their teeth during the day, especially when performing stressful activities e.g. driving in traffic. Chewing gum is another way in which the jaw can be over-used.

## WHY HAVE I GOT PAIN IN MY JAW JOINT?

Over-use of the jaw joint causes pain and discomfort in the jaw joint itself and/or the muscles which move the jaw. This can be compared to an athlete who trains without taking proper rest – their muscles and joints become sore just like those in the over-used jaw joint. If you have been under stress clenching and/or grinding habits may become more pronounced making jaw pain more likely.

## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT MY TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT DYSFUNCTION?

The most important thing is to appreciate that, because your jaw is being over-used at night, you need to do as much as possible to rest it during the day:

- **Avoid difficult foods** e.g. crusty bread, toffees. Cut food into small pieces so that less chewing effort is required. Avoid wide opening (e.g. yawning).
- **Painkillers** - anti-inflammatory medication such as Ibuprofen is useful for painful episodes.
- **Heat** - a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel and applied to the side of the face is helpful to relax tense muscles.
- **Massage** - the muscles which move the jaw joint can be massaged twice daily to help them to relax. Your clinician can show you how to do this.
- **Exercises** - if these are appropriate your clinician will discuss them with you.
- **Breaking habits** - if you chew gum this must be stopped. Other habitual jaw movements such as nail biting or nail chewing must also be stopped.
- **Physiotherapy** - this is provided by a physiotherapist

- **Relaxation techniques** - learning techniques to control tension and stress.
- **A soft bite raising appliance** - this is a clear plastic splint similar to the mouth guard worn by rugby or hockey players. A mould is taken so that this fits your mouth. It is worn over the lower teeth at night and can help prevent the effects of clenching or grinding. Your clinician will advise you if they feel this is appropriate. The appliance must be worn every night for a number of months in order to have the desired effect.
- **Steroid injection into the joint** - this is useful in only a small number of cases. Your clinician will advise you if this is appropriate.
- **Surgery** - this is useful in only a very small number of cases and is rarely recommended

It is important to remember that jaw joint problems, although a nuisance, are not sinister and the vast majority settle with the use of simple management techniques, over a period of months, as described above. It is extremely rare for jaw joint problems to progress to arthritis.