

Temporomandibular joint

Information and advice for patients

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The Temporomandibular joint

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is the joint where the lower jaw joins the temporal bone of the skull. It is immediately in front of the ear on each side of your head (jaw joint).

What can go wrong with the TMJ?

Most patients typically present with four features; pain just in front of the ears, noise/clicking in the joint, tenderness at the back of the ears and limitations in the opening of the mouth.

Causes of TMJ dysfunction

TMJ dysfunction is caused by many things acting together:

- Clenching your teeth together. You may do this when you are worried, stressed or depressed.
- Grinding your teeth together. You can do this during the day or at night.
- Habits such as nail biting, chewing pencils, holding things in your mouth and holding the telephone between your neck and shoulder.
- Constant chewing e.g. chewing gum.

Symptoms associated with TMJ dysfunction

- Jaw pain or soreness
- Jaw pain when biting, chewing or yawning
- Clicking from your jaw joint when you move it
- Stiffness or locking of your jaw joint
- Earache
- Difficulty opening and closing your mouth
- Headaches
- Difficulty swallowing

What you can do to help TMJ dysfunction

Treatment is around self-care:

- Keep your teeth apart. The correct resting position for your jaw is to have your teeth slightly apart and your tongue resting on the floor of your mouth.

- Avoid opening your mouth really wide.
- Avoid habits like nail biting or chewing gum.
- Avoid straining your neck and back with prolonged poor posture.
- Eat foods that you do not need to chew hard or for a long time.
- Wear the hard bite guard if your dentist gives you one.
- Try to reduce stress in your life if possible and do more physical exercise.

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