Taking Care of Your Jaw

Patient TMJ Guide

What is TMJ?

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is the hinge on each side of your face, just in front of your ears. It lets you chew, talk and yawn. When the joint or the muscles around it hurt or do not work well, it is called a TMJ disorder. Many cases get better on their own, and most can be managed with simple, gentle steps.

Common signs

- Jaw, face or neck pain or soreness
- Clicking, popping or grating when you open or close your mouth
- A stiff jaw, or a jaw that catches or gets stuck
- Morning headaches or aching around your temples
- Ear pain or ringing with no ear infection
- Worn, flat or chipped teeth from grinding or clenching

A click without pain is common and usually not a problem.

Call us if

- Your jaw locks open or closed, or you cannot open your mouth normally
- Your bite suddenly feels different
- You have swelling or a fever along with jaw pain
- Your pain is not getting better after a few weeks

Call 911 if jaw pain comes with chest pain, shortness of breath or sweating.

Jaw pain can sometimes be a sign of a heart problem.

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What you can do at home

- ☐ Eat soft foods for a few days when your jaw is sore.
- ☐ Use a warm or cold pack on the sore area for about 10 minutes.
- ☐ Skip gum, ice, hard and chewy foods. Take small bites.
- ☐ Keep your lips together and your teeth apart. Let your jaw relax.
- ☐ Do not bite your nails or chew on pens.
- ☐ Do gentle jaw stretches only if we have shown you how.
- ☐ Take an over-the-counter pain reliever as directed on the label or by your doctor.
- ☐ Find ways to unwind. Stress often shows up in the jaw.

Night Guard Use and Care

- Wear as directed.
- Clean it with a soft toothbrush and cool water. Never use hot water.
- Keep it in its case, away from pets.
- Bring it to your visits. If it makes your pain worse, stop and call us.

Notes from your visit

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