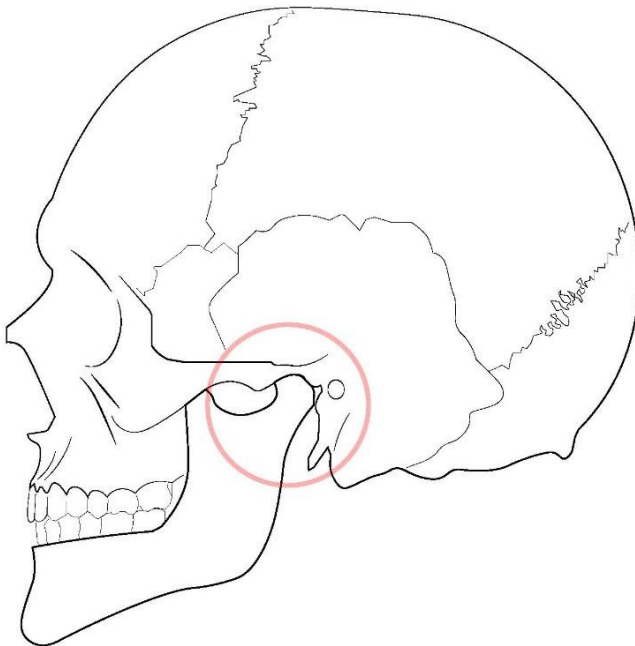


Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Disorders

Information for patients



Introduction

Your TMJs (jaw joints) are among the most used joints in your body. They allow you to talk, chew, swallow, yawn and sneeze.

TMJ problems are common. Symptoms might include pain in the jaw and face, clicking, difficulty opening the jaw or finding that your jaw locks. Many problems are caused or made worse by overuse or misuse of the joints and muscles.

There is no cure for the problem, but there are treatments that can help.

It is reassuring to know that the symptoms rarely get worse, and they might go away on their own.

Investigations – for example MRI scans – are not usually needed. Surgery is usually only considered as a last resort.

How can I help my pain?

Joint positioning

The best position to keep your TMJ in is with your teeth slightly apart and lips together. Put your tongue on the roof of your mouth. This is called the 'no position'.

Try to breathe through your nose as much as possible.

Yawning

When yawning, hold your tongue on the roof of your mouth in the 'no position'. Use your hand to stop your mouth opening too far.

Diet changes

- Eat a diet of softer foods for a while
- Try grating foods
- Take smaller bites
- Avoid hard or chewy foods – for example, nuts, toffee, crusty bread
- Chew on your back teeth and chew evenly.



Neck posture

Poor neck posture can make your TMJ pain worse. Avoid poking your chin forwards. Your physiotherapist may teach you how to improve your posture. Do this as much as you can.

Relaxation

Stress can cause you to clench your jaw or grind your teeth which can make your TMJ problem worse. Aim to avoid clenching and grinding your teeth from concentrating or worry.

Activities such as relaxation, meditation, yoga, or CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) may be useful.

Dental appliance

If you have been provided with a mouth splint or night splint, this may help to ease the pain – especially if you grind your teeth at night.

Pain relief

- **Ice cube massage** – place ice into a damp cloth and rub gently over the painful area for 5-10mins
- **Heat** – use a wash cloth soaked in warm water or a heat pack over the painful area for 10-15mins
- **Finger massage** – your physiotherapist may teach you how to do self-trigger point treatment on some muscles
- **Drugs** – if first-line treatments have failed, your doctor may suggest some drugs to help
- **Acupuncture** – some people try this but there is no good evidence to support this.

Things to avoid

- Avoid chewing pens or holding things in your mouth
- Avoid chewing gum
- Avoid biting your fingernails, lips, tongue or gums
- Avoid doing movements specific to your jaw that make it clunk, pop or click ('party tricks').

If you have any questions or concerns, please approach your physiotherapist.

This leaflet was compiled by the WGH and SJH Physiotherapy departments in conjunction with NHS Lothian Physiotherapy Services.