

TMJ Disorder

What is the TMJ?

The TMJ (temporomandibular joint) is commonly known as the jaw joint. It is used every time you chew as well as every time you speak or swallow which is every minute or so. Therefore, it is one of the most frequently used joints of the body.

To locate the TMJ, place your fingers just in front of your ears and feel it moving by opening and closing your mouth. The joint allows the jaw to open, close and move to the side and forward.

TMD or TMJ Dysfunction

TMD (temporomandibular dysfunction) may affect one or both joints often causing pain and limiting jaw function. Symptoms can arise in early adulthood, but children and the elderly can also be affected.

TMD is common, with about 70 per cent of everyone being affected at some time in their lives. However, only about 1 in 4 are aware of the symptoms and only 5 per cent seek treatment.

Most symptoms are mild and need no treatment as they go away with time. However, in some people they need to be actively managed by their dentist.

Symptoms of TMD

TMJ disorder can cause different symptoms that may vary from mild, constant discomfort to severe intermittent pain. Headaches, ear pain, facial and neck pain are common symptoms. Often there is difficulty in opening the mouth and clicking, grating or popping from the joint or locking of the jaw. Toothaches can sometimes be experienced or feeling of an uncomfortable bite.

TMJ disorder is often not so much felt in the joint itself as in the affected muscles above and below the jaws. It is a bit like having a stone in your shoe, not just your foot sore but your ankles, legs and back are affected as you try to keep off the aggravated area.

TMJ is often a disorder that is poorly diagnosed as it mimics many different conditions and has such a wide variety of symptoms.

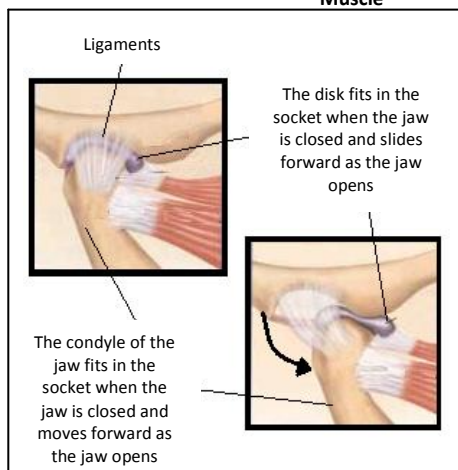
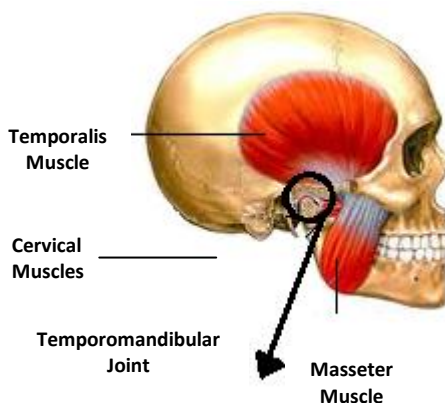
Causes of TMJ Disorder

TMJ disorder can be caused by a variety of ways including:

- Teeth that are misaligned, missing teeth, poor dental work (wrong shaped fillings, crowns or bridges) or orthodontics.
- Muscles fatigue from grinding or clenching of teeth which may be linked to stress. Emotional or physical stress can also cause tension in the jaw muscles.
- Jaw injuries such as fractures or dislocation of the TMJ or even trauma from falls or car accidents.
- Degenerate disease such as osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

In some cases, the cause of their TMJ disorder is difficult to diagnose and may include a combination of the above factors.

What muscles can TMJ affect?



Treatment of TMJ disorders

TMJ disorders are best treated 'conservatively' that is using treatment methods that do not have a permanent affect on the teeth or joint. Relief of symptoms may take time, particularly if the TMJ disorder has developed over a long period.

In developing your treatment plan some or all of the following components may be used. Referral may also be needed.

1. Wearing a Splint

Wearing a Splint at night to prevent grinding while sleeping is highly effective in taking pressure off your jaw joint. It can reduce muscle tension and limit the effects of clenching and grinding of your teeth.



2. Modify your diet

You can try to minimise chewing and rest your jaw more by decreasing the amount of food you eat that requires a longer chewing time (eg. steak). Definitely avoid chewing gum. If you usually eat on one side try to chew on both sides to spread the load.

3. Physiotherapy

Exercises, massage, gentle movements and muscle stretching can be effective in reducing pain and stiffness. We can refer you to a Physiotherapy clinic that specialises in the relief of jaw and neck pain.

4. Warm Packs

muscle relaxation can be achieved by applying warm packs to the tender areas.

5. Relaxation and Stress Management

Learning how to relax and reduce your stress can relieve tension in the joints and muscles.

6. Medication

The use of medication for a short time may be required. Anti-inflammatory painkillers are best suited. Take medication only as directed.