



## Easing Symptoms of TMJ (Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction)

Many patients report having some symptoms of “temporomandibular joint dysfunction” (commonly known as “TMJ”) at some time in their lives. These symptoms can include: joint noises (popping, clicking) from one or both joints; pain in joints, neck, ears, teeth; headaches, particularly upon waking; “locking” of jaws, either open or closed; and/or a feeling of tenseness in the “chewing” muscles.

What can you do? The following are some suggestions that can be used to try to alleviate these annoying symptoms.

1. Sleep on your back. Use a “neck roll” or support pillow to help support your neck, and help to encourage you to stay on your back. You will find this easier if you also use a pillow under your knees.
2. Use ice packs. Cold packs held on the joints will help ease the swelling and inflammation of the joint tissues. Try the ten minutes on, ten minutes off routine.
3. Use moist heat. Warm, moist towels held on the joints can help ease the muscle tenseness. Once again, try the “ten minutes on, ten minutes off” routine. It is okay to alternate moist heat and ice packs, as long as this does not increase your discomfort.
4. Limit your intake of dietary stimulants. Avoid colas, coffee, tea, chocolate, and other caffeine-containing substances.
5. Avoid hard chewing. During the times when you have symptoms, eat a soft diet. Do not chew gum. Avoid biting with your front teeth.
6. Avoid “clenching” your teeth. Think “lips together, teeth apart”.
7. Avoid extremes of opening. Try to limit opening wide with yawning and eating (no Big Macs!), and avoid extreme lateral (side-to-side) movements.
8. Do not lean on your chin while sitting at a table.
9. Always strive for “good posture”. It is best to sit with knees slightly above hips. Use small footrests and pillows to achieve this.
10. Use gentle opening and closing of jaw to help relax the muscles. Do not open wide.
11. Common sense “good health” habits will always help. Eliminate the use of tobacco and alcohol from your life. Begin or continue regular exercise habits.
12. If you have an occlusal appliance (night guard, bite plane, orthodontic appliance, etc.) make certain that you wear it as directed. If there are ANY problems with the appliance, let us know!
13. If medication has been recommended for you, take it as prescribed. Usually, this will consist of ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, or other brands, or prescription ibuprofen) 400 to 600 mg to be taken every 4 to 6 hours for 2 or 3 days, whether you are having pain at that moment, or not. This regimen will help decrease inflammation of the joints, AND provide some pain relief. Please consult with one of our doctors before using any medication.

Most of the time, “TMJ” symptoms are moderately annoying, and temporary. However, this is not always the case. If you feel that your symptoms are severe, or have been present for an extended period of time, or are increasing instead of diminishing even with good home care habits, you **MUST** let us know. **Sometimes, more aggressive treatments are required.**

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