

Temporo-mandibular Joint Disorder (TMJ)

TMJ is an inflammatory disorder of the jaw joint and associated muscles of the jaw. TMJ usually presents as a sharp pain in the ear and can radiate down the jaw or to the neck and head. Sometimes it can even cause headaches and ringing in the ears. It is usually worse during times of stress, chewing, talking and grinding of the teeth. TMJ is usually diagnosed by an ear, nose and throat doctor because it involves ear pain, and it is usually best treated with over the counter medicines (see instructions below). The pain in the ear is a referred pain from nerves that connect the ear and jaw. If conservative therapy does not help, you will usually need to see an oral surgeon.

Over the counter management of TMJ (Follow the instructions below for 2 weeks). If your TMJ is bother you after this 2 week treatment period, you should be evaluated by an oral surgeon.

1. Rest the jaw as you would any other sore joint.
 - a. Stick to a soft diet, avoiding chewy food such as pizza crust and tough meats. Avoid gum chewing, ice chewing.
2. Get a mouth piece to support the jaw.
 - a. These can be found at your local department store (either a sports mouthpiece or the Doctor's Night Guard[®]). These should be worn as much as tolerated (during work and even while sleeping) during the 2 week treatment period.
3. Pain relief.
 - a. Ibuprofen (Advil and Motrin are also acceptable) should be cleared by your primary care physician before starting this. Each tablet is 200mg. You should take 2 of these tablets, three times per day. This is a total of 6 tablets per day.
4. Relax the jaw muscles with warm compresses.
 - a. Instructions for warm compresses
 - i. Put 1 cup of dry, uncooked rice in a clean sock and secure it with a rubber band (do not use metal ties)
 - ii. Place the pack in the microwave for 15-30 seconds until the compress is warm (not hot) to the touch. Test on your wrist before applying it to the jaw.
 - iii. Apply warm compress to jaw for 15 minutes three times a day.
5. Stress relief.
 - a. It is important to take time for yourself during this 2 week treatment period. Try to get some exercise, get a massage or something else you enjoy to help yourself relax. This will prevent jaw clenching and other habits that worsen TMJ.