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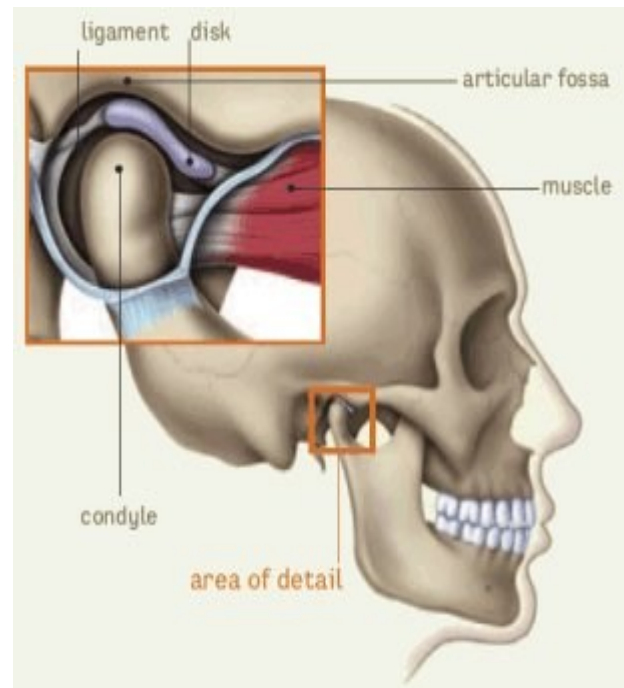
TMJ Disorders

What Are TMJ Disorders?

TMJ Disorders (also known as TMJ, TMD and CMD) are a group of conditions that affect the facial muscles and jaw joints. Symptoms and signs can include:

- Headaches
- Face, neck and shoulder pains
- Ear and eye discomfort
- Clicking or popping noises in the jaw joint
- Difficulties speaking, chewing, or swallowing
- Tooth wear or fracture

These conditions are relatively common. Approximately 65% of the population show some signs that are normally associated with these problems. A third of the population will have symptoms of a TMJ disorder, and 10% to 15% of people will seek treatment for one of these conditions.



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What Causes These Disorders?

Generally, these conditions are a result of some injury to the muscles and joints of the face. This may be due to direct trauma, such as a blow to the jaw or being in a sporting or car accident. It can also be due to overloading of the muscles and joints from unconscious habits that we may practice. These are generally related to clenching or grinding our teeth, although some other activities that require us to use our jaw joints and facial muscles can also cause problems. Examples of these include scuba diving or playing musical instruments like the clarinet or violin. Neck and shoulder problems can also contribute to facial pain, either indirectly through promoting excessive muscle activity, or via pain referred to sites in the face.

Bruxism

Bruxism is the technical name for the unconscious or semiconscious habit of clenching or grinding your teeth. This need not be done with great force long periods of light contact between your teeth can overload your facial muscles and jaw joints. Teeth are not designed to be in contact for long periods of time. Normally, they only come into contact briefly when you swallow and chew. The total time taken up by these activities in a day is less than 20 minutes. Prolonged tooth-to-tooth contact can lead to over loading and pain, and the possibility of more serious damage to the structures within the jaw joints. The normal posture for the lower jaw is hanging in a sling formed by the relaxed muscles of your face, with 2 to 3 millimeters of space between the teeth.

There are two patterns of bruxism:

Nocturnal or night time bruxism.

This is an unconscious habit that affected people practice whilst asleep. As you are asleep you have no conscious control over this habit. Generally, nocturnal bruxism is associated with increased levels of stress or tiredness, e.g family problems, exams, busy times at work, etc.

Diurnal or day time bruxing.

This is a sub-conscious habit, and can be controlled. Most people are unaware of clenching or grinding their teeth during the day. Some factors tend to be associated with this form of bruxism:

- Stress (as above)
- Hard physical activity such as exercising at the gym, gardening or lifting
- Tasks requiring mental concentration such as reading, studying, working on a computer or driving

Any of these habits can lead to excessive loading of the muscles and joints of the face, leading to the unpleasant symptoms mentioned earlier. It should be noted that most people grind their teeth at some time. It is normally only when this habit exceeds your ability to adapt to the increased loading that your muscles and joints tell you that there is something wrong - by hurting.

Controlling Bruxism

Reducing the pain of TMJ disorders generally relies on controlling the habits that caused the problem and giving the muscles and joints a rest. Bruxism can be controlled by a number of means:

- An **occlusal splint**, which is a hard plastic device which looks like a slim mouth guard, can be worn to reduce the intensity of bruxing habits. These are normally worn at night, although you can also wear them during the day if required. Splints also play an important role in protecting teeth and restorations from potential damage caused by bruxism.
- **Awareness of jaw posture and tooth contact.** You can improve your awareness of your jaw posture, and whether your teeth are in contact, by using postural training exercises such as you have been shown. These work by reinforcing the desired posture and making you more aware of the contrasting feelings associated with the undesirable and preferred jaw positions.

Treatments for TMJ Disorders

Treatments include:

- Providing you with advice regarding your problem and how it can be controlled
- Postural and awareness training
- Occlusal splint therapy
- Using medications to reduce pain, muscle tension and inflammation (unfortunately, the benefit of this treatment is lost if we do not address the cause as well)
- Physiotherapy, which can be useful in many cases especially where neck and shoulder problems exist
- Behavior counseling to assist you to relax more effectively and control stress better

Surgery

Surgery is not commonly needed to treat TMJ disorders. Less than 10% of people who present to their dentist with one of these conditions will need surgery to treat their problem. These are normally related to more severe problems, where considerable damage has occurred to the structures within the jaw joint. A number of surgical options are available, including Arthroscopy (similar to that done on other joints, e.g., knee and ankles).

Normally, non-invasive treatments such as those mentioned above, will be used before surgery is contemplated. You will be advised if there is a risk that you will need surgical intervention.

Do and Don't

- **DO** follow the treatment program that has been prescribed as closely as possible.
- **DO** wear your occlusal splint (if one is prescribed) as recommended.
- **DON'T** eat hard or tough foods. A soft diet will reduce the load on your sore joints and muscles.
- **DON'T** open your mouth widely, as this also places an increased load on your muscles and joints. Cut your food into small pieces and stifle yawns.
- **DON'T** sleep on your stomach, or sit with your chin resting on your hands. These activities place a significant load on your jaw joints.
- **DO** use heat packs on sore muscles and joints. These problems are due to chronic inflammation of the muscles and joints - this is quite amenable to heat treatments (10-15 minutes, once or twice a day - be careful not to burn yourself. Moderate warmth is all that is needed).
- **DO** avoid activities that have been identified as contributing to your problem.
- If you can make your jaw joints click at will, or if you can intentionally provoke pain symptoms - **DON'T**. Such activity will only maintain or worsen the problem.
- **DO** contact us if you have further questions, or if your symptoms deteriorate.

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact us

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