

Physical Therapy for Temporomandibular Disorders (TMD)

1. The controversial phrase “Temporomandibular dysfunction” is a lack of normal function between the upper and lower jaws. It can be caused by accidents, surgery, developmental defects, peculiar oral habits, extensive dental restorations (fillings), naturally occurring malocclusion (poor bite), orthodontics, psychological stress, clenching or grinding of teeth, or other conditions.
2. Physical therapy can help your jaw joints to function freely and without pain. If you follow the treatment below, you will relax your chewing muscles, reduce severe headaches, and prevent related discomfort. This therapy has approximately an 80 percent success rate for patients with muscular-oriented TMD. If physical therapy is not successful, additional treatment may be necessary.
3. Selecting a time to accomplish the exercises. For best results, do these exercises once a day, unless directed otherwise. The exercises require 15 minutes. Choose a relaxed time of the day, such as immediately before bedtime, when you will be able to do the exercises without interruption. You may want to use a timer to ensure that you are spending enough time with the exercises.
4. Accomplishing the exercises:
 - a. **Heat:** Place a heating pad, hot washcloth, hot-water bottle, or other heat source on the painful areas of your head or neck. Apply this heat for five minutes to relax your muscles for the exercises.
 - b. **Exercises:** Do the following exercises for one minute each (a total of five minutes).
 - (1) **Open-Close:** Place a closed fist under your chin to gently resist movement. Open and close your mouth 30 times (one second to open and one second to close).
 - (2) **Forward-Backward:** Place a closed fist on the front of your chin to gently resist movement. Move your lower jaw forward and backward 30 times (one second forward and one second backward).
 - (3) **Right:** Place a closed fist on the right side of your chin to gently resist movement. You may have to look into a mirror to do this. Move your jaw to the right, and then return your jaw to a relaxed position 30 times (one second right and one second to chewing position).
 - (4) **Left:** Place a closed fist on the left side of your chin to gently resist movement. Move your jaw to the left, and then return your jaw to a relaxed position 30 times (one second left and one second to chewing position).
 - (5) **Head Turn (Stand or Sit Up Very Straight):**
 - Right:** Turn your head all the way to the right, and place the palm of your hand on the left side of your jaw. Every two seconds, push your head slightly farther to the right to stretch the muscles, and then return your head to the original side position (15 times).
 - Left:** Turn your head all the way to the left, and place the palm of your hand on the right side of your jaw. Every two seconds, push your head slightly farther to the left to stretch the muscles, and then return your head to the original side position (15 times).
 - c. **Heat:** Apply heat for another five minutes as suggested in Step (4a) to relax your muscles.
5. Additional Treatment — such as a plastic bite splint (an occlusal splint) to assist in making you bite in the correct position, or slight trimming of teeth and fillings to make your teeth and jaws come together correctly (occlusal equilibration) may be needed to assist in your therapy.
6. If you have questions please contact us.