

University Dental Hospital of Manchester

Information for Patients

Temporomandibular Disorder (TMD) Clinic

Advice for those suffering from face and jaw muscle pain

We have given you this leaflet because:

- Some of the pain that you have in your jaw and face is caused by painful muscles.
- This leaflet will tell you about things that you can do to make your pain better.
- If you follow the advice given, it will help to give you the best chance to make your pain better.

The techniques in this leaflet may be used alongside treatments. For example physiotherapy, medicine or bite-splints.

Rest

Your jaw muscles will be less painful if they can rest. Unfortunately, it is difficult to rest your jaw muscles completely because you need to use them all the time, for talking and eating. We call this normal function. The good news is – there are ways to change how you use your jaw muscles to help them rest.

Change how you eat

- Avoid foods that need a lot of chewing or hard biting. For example meat, sticky sweets or chewing gum.
- Avoid foods that you open your mouth wide to eat. For example apples and burgers.

Change your jaw-movement habits

- Using your jaw for talking and eating are part of what we call **normal function**. Your jaw is being moved by the jaw muscles when this is happening.
- There are some other jaw movements that you can make using your jaw muscles that can tire the muscles out.
- These are not part of normal function. Instead, we call them **parafunctions**. They can make your jaw muscles very painful. Reducing these **parafunctions** can be very helpful to reduce your pain.

Here are some examples of what we call parafunctions, and ways to help reduce them:

Clenching your teeth tightly together. You can reduce this yourself if it happens during the day. Being aware of this is the first step towards reducing it. Try putting some coloured dots on familiar objects like your TV, car dashboard, computer screen and fridge. Every time you see a dot, think 'Am I clenching my teeth?' and if you are clenching your teeth, stop.

Biting things which are not food. A habit of biting things like pen tops, nails, lips or tongue. Reduce this in the same way that clenching of teeth is reduced, described above.

Grinding your teeth together. The teeth are tightly clenched together and moved around at the same time. This can sometimes make a noise. It can happen during the day or night.

Grinding during the day can be reduced in the same way as clenching of the teeth. However, if your pain is worse when you wake up, this may be an indication that you are grinding your teeth at night. Another name for grinding your teeth at night is Sleep Bruxism.

Sleep Bruxism

If you grind your teeth at night you might not know it is happening; but other people might be able to hear it. Ask your sleep partner if they have heard you grinding your teeth.

Sleep Bruxism is closely linked with stress and poor sleep. Improving the quality of your sleep will help to reduce sleep bruxism. To improve your sleep, try some of the following suggestions which are known as good sleep hygiene. Try doing as many of these as possible:

- Have a gentle walk, or other gentle exercise before going to bed.
- Avoid things that give you energy. For example caffeine or nicotine in tobacco.
- Don't go to bed too late or too tired.
- Improve the quality of your sleep environment. Have a comfortable bed, in a quiet and darkened room, at a comfortable room temperature for you.

There is a lack of evidence to suggest that Sleep Bruxism is caused by the way your teeth fit together. This is why we do not advise that your 'bite' (also called 'occlusion') is changed to reduce Bruxism.

Heat Treatment

Applying a warm compress to the painful muscles is a very effective, simple treatment. If your pain is worse when the weather is cold, or when you are stressed, it is very likely that heat will help to reduce your pain.

The purple area in the photo shows where to hold the warm compresses on your skin:



It is important that you follow these instructions:

Every day, apply a warm moist towel to the sore areas of your face for at least 5 minutes. Do this three times a day for six weeks. You can also use a hot-water bottle, or a microwavable hand-warmer. If you use these, put a warm moist cloth around them.

You should do this every day, even on days when there is not as much pain. This is because it is treatment for the muscles and not just pain relief.

The photo shows a warm compress being applied to the left side of the face:



The Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Association (a patient group for people suffering from TMD based in the USA) surveyed their members. They asked which treatments their members thought were best at reducing pain. Ninety-one percent said that, out of 46 types of treatment, warm compresses were the best, so it can work!

Remember: 3 times a day for at least 6 weeks.

Relaxation Therapies and Improving Coping Strategies

Stress can prolong jaw muscle pain and make it worse; therefore treatments to reduce stress may be useful to reduce your pain too. Also, if you have experienced jaw muscle pain for over 6 months, it is likely that you have suffered changes in your emotional well-being. There are ways to improve this and reduce stress.

Understanding and acknowledging these issues is the first step to improving your chances of a good recovery. Therapies which are likely to help include:

- Relaxation therapies
- Abdominal breathing techniques
- Yoga
- Mindfulness techniques such as Breathworks see www.breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk
- Talking Therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which may be available through your General Practitioner (GP).

By using therapies such as those listed above it is likely that you will be able to reduce the effects that your chronic pain has upon the quality of your life. As you learn to manage your pain your life will hopefully become easier and more enjoyable. As your mood improves your sensitivity to pain will reduce.

If you have any further questions please contact the Restorative Department on Telephone number (0161) 393 7734. Open Monday – Friday 9.00 am – 4.30 pm.