



## Jaw Pain Management

Just like other muscles in the body, the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) and the muscles surrounding it can become overworked. This results in strain on the jaw that can cause pain in the joint between the upper and lower jaws, and in the muscles responsible for moving the jaw. The most common solution to this problem is to find the activity that is overworking your jaw and eradicate it. Many factors can stress the jaw, fortunately there are many ways to alleviate this stress.

The following guide is constructed with techniques that will help mitigate the overworking of your jaw. Every person is different, therefore the solution and methods that alleviate your overworked jaw will be unique. This guide is a living document, as such, if you have any suggestions or methods that aided in treating your jaw that are not listed on the sheet, please let us know and provide feedback. We greatly value your input.

### **Become Aware of Jaw Usage Patterns and Habits:**

Determine if your jaw muscles are tired in the morning or at the end of the day. This will give you important information about whether your jaw is being overworked in the day or at night while you are asleep. Be aware of any contact that your teeth make, resting positions that your jaw constantly returns to, clenching, grinding, gritting, tapping of the teeth, or tensing of the muscles that control how your jaw moves. Take note of when these symptoms occur whether it be driving, studying, reading, working, social outings, conversing, fatiguing, overworking, stressing, or emotional well-being. Additionally, pay attention to whether you can eat on both sides of your mouth.

### **Positioning the Jaw:**

Your teeth should only make contact during chewing and swallowing. Do your best to rest the jaw by leaving the teeth slightly apart when you refrain from talking, chewing, or swallowing. It may aid to place the tip of the tongue just behind the upper front teeth and have the teeth and tongue kept slightly apart.



### **Diet Changes:**

Softer foods place less stress on the jaw muscles and joints than harder, and rougher foods. Refrain from eating foods that demand you to open wide and bite into them with your front teeth, such as apples, pears, and large sandwiches. We suggest cutting these foods into smaller pieces and chew them with your rear teeth. Avoid chewy foods, such as gum, leather fruit, and candies, since these require strong and excessive jaw movement.

### **Avoid Wide Jaw Openings:**

During moments when your jaw is open wide, such as yawning, support the jaw by placing your index finger and thumb under your chin. Excessive movements will place stress on the joint and the muscles of your jaw. Attempt to minimize these movements as much as possible.

### **Do Not Test Your Jaw:**

The temptation may arise to move your jaw around to check how much of the soreness has subsided. Often times, people open wide and swing their jaw from side to side beyond the usual range of motion. Rather than being an effective test for your jaw, this method only further damages the joint and its surrounding structure, which does not aid in alleviating your issues.

### **Sleep Patterns:**

Abstain from sleeping in a position that will unnecessarily stress your jaw. This includes, but is not limited to, sleeping on your stomach, or with your jaw resting on your hand or arm. It may prove helpful to position and prop pillows beside you to prevent moving into a harmful position while you are asleep.

### **Avoid Postures that Place Pressure on your Jaw:**

Refrain from leaning on your chin or jaw regardless of the situation. This applies especially when you position your head to press a telephone against your shoulder.



### **Apply Moist Heat to the Muscles Around the Jaw in Moments of Pain:**

If you experience muscle pain in the area, commence the following instructions at least twice a day, for 10 minutes each. Place two towels in hot water, squeeze excess moisture from one towel and wrap it under your chin on both sides of your face extending up towards your temples. When this towel loses its heat, place it back in the hot water and switch to the other towel.

Alternatively, you can use a hot water bottle instead of a towel. Use enough hot water to allow pliable placement of the hot water bottle around your head. Squeeze out any leftover air to ensure optimal heat transfer. Wrap the hot water bottle in a moist towel. Place the wrapped water bottle against one side of your face extending from your chin up to the temple. Alternate sides after 10 minutes or preferably 20 minutes.

### **Massage the Muscles of the Jaw System:**

For acute episodes of muscle spasms, see a massage therapist, physiotherapist or chiropractor for instructions on how to massage your jaw muscles at home.

### **Bruxism Appliance:**

A Bruxism appliance is a night guard. Patients may find that their symptoms are reduced/relieved when a night guard is used, especially when that patient has been known to clench or grind their teeth while sleeping. Please ask us for more information or to find out whether or not a night guard would be appropriate for your situation.

### **General Recommendations:**

Adequate sleep, good nutrition, relaxation techniques, and simply stopping when you notice yourself doing something harmful to your jaw are all effective ways of reducing and relieving jaw pain.