

Temporomandibular Joint Disorders

Service User Information Leaflet

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Introduction

Temporomandibular joint disorders are usually known as “TMJ disorders” for short. TMJ disorders affect the jaw joints. The jaw joints lie in front of the ears on each side of the head. The TMJ connects the jaw bone (mandible) to the skull near the temple (Figure 1).

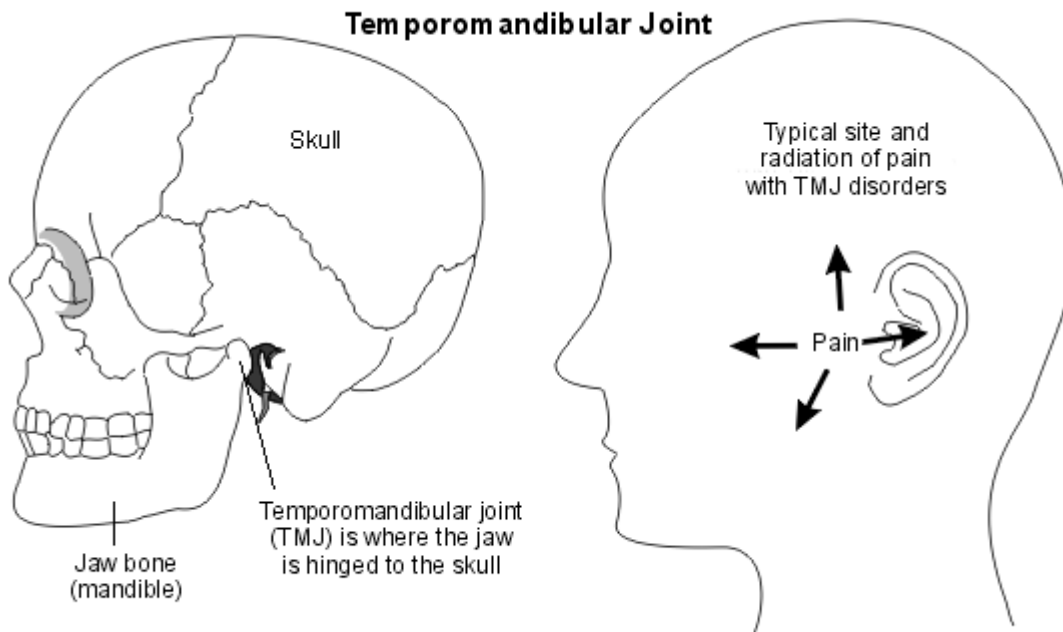


Figure 1: Location of the Temporomandibular (TMJ) Joint

TMJ disorders are fairly common. About 1 in 10 people have symptoms at some point in their lives. The information here is based on the latest studies.

Remember;

Most TMJ disorders can be helped with simple treatments like resting the jaw joint and pain medication. Most TMJ disorders improve with time and do not get any worse.

What are the symptoms of Temporomandibular disorders?

- Local pain and tenderness in the jaw joint and / or a dull ache over the side of the face.
- Reduced movement of the jaw joint so there can be problems opening and /or closing the mouth.
- Clicking may be heard when the jaw joint moves, for example when chewing. Remember clicking can be normal; it is only relevant when there is pain and / or reduced movement.

What are the causes of Temporomandibular disorders?

There are many factors that can contribute to TMJ problems. These factors can be divided into two groups:

- (1) Problems with the muscles moving the joint and / or
- (2) Problems inside the jaw joint.

Problems with the muscles can be caused by:

Increased activity of jaw muscles

- This can occur due to an alteration in the bite pattern and chewing action of an individual. It can also occur if an individual clenches the jaw a lot at night during sleep, which is common. Any alteration in the way the teeth come together is called occlusion and should be checked with a dentist.
- Stress or tension can also affect the muscles which can cause pain due to overuse. Emotional stress can present as teeth clenching.

Problems with the jaw joint can be due to:

- Age changes in the joint can affect the cartilage such as osteoarthritis. This is more common in older people.
- Inflammation in the joint can occur due to another type of arthritis, for example rheumatoid arthritis can affect the jaw joint sometimes.
- Trauma to the jaw joint can cause TMJ pain, for example in contact sports a blow to this area can result in subluxation or dislocation.

Managing TMJ Pain:

- Rest the jaw joint when possible.
- Eat softer foods and avoid chewing gum.
- Avoid biting your nails.
- Do not repetitively open mouth looking for clicks.
- Do not open your mouth too wide, for example when yawning or singing.
- Practice relaxation. Tension and stress can make you clench your jaw and increase the pain.
- Sometimes a bite raising appliance can help. Your dentist can assess whether this is the case.

Treatments:

- Applying warmth can help, for example, a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel.
- An ice pack wrapped in a cold damp towel can also be effective.
- Alternating warmth and ice can also help ease the pain.
- Pain medication can help. Non prescription ones are usually enough (read the leaflet). If these are not enough for you, your doctor may prescribe medication that can help.

Exercise:

The following exercise should help your jaw muscles to improve:

- (1) Close your mouth with your top and bottom back teeth touching and the tip of your tongue just behind the upper front teeth.
- (2) Run the tip of your tongue backwards to the soft part at the top of your mouth.
- (3) Keep your tongue in that position and slowly open your mouth until you feel your tongue moving forward. Don't go any further and hold for 5 seconds.
- (4) Now close your mouth and relax for 5 seconds.
- (5) Repeat this for 5 minutes.

Do this exercise in front of the mirror to make sure your lower jaw moves directly downward and doesn't go the one side or the other.

At first you may get some increase in pain due to the muscles working in new way. After 2 to 3 weeks your jaw should feel better as the muscles are retrained.

If these simple measures have not helped after a month of correct and regular exercise, you should return to your doctor or health care practitioner for further assessment.

Outlook for Temporomandibular Joint Disorder

The outlook for this condition is generally good and the pain should decrease over time with these simple treatments.

For Further Advice:

www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints

Patient.co.uk

<http://www.patient.co.uk/>

For free and confidential advice about work call the Healthy Working Lives Adviceline on 0800 019 2211.

www.healthyworkinglives.com