

TMJ TREATMENT OPTIONS

TMJ is the easy way of saying temporomandibular joint, which although is an anatomic structure, has come to mean jaw joint dysfunction from a number of different causes. TMJ dysfunction can have symptoms of noise and/or pain by the ears when moving the lower jaw (as in eating or yawning), persistent headaches, neck and back pain, diminished hearing, and sinus trouble. In severe cases, the motion of the lower jaw is limited, as in being unable to open wide enough to take a big bite out of a sandwich. If the condition is left untreated, it could result in being a very debilitating problem later in life. To complicate matters, not all pain in the jaw area is caused by TMJ. Problems that can mimic TMJ symptoms are headaches (migraine, sinus, muscle contraction, chemical), toothaches, ear infections, sinusitis, temporal arteritis, carotidynia, neuralgias, Lyme disease, and arthritis (rheumatoid, osteoarthritis). Like many other health problems, TMJ dysfunction does not have a standard approach, and it depends whether you want to treat the cause (if possible), or treat just the symptoms. Not only dentists, but chiropractors, physical therapists, physicians, cranial osteopaths, and other alternative health care providers treat TMJ dysfunction, so don't expect agreement on what the problem is or what should be done about it. The effective approach most likely is a combination of these approaches. It is your responsibility to decide which treatment and when, so it would be wise to seek more than one opinion before beginning treatment.

CONVENTIONAL TREATMENT APPROACHES include:

1. **Orthodontic/Orthopedic** - to mechanically reposition the teeth and/or jaws permanently with braces to create a balanced bite and jaw joint relationship
2. **Dental** - to restore a balanced jaw and bite relationship with crowns, fillings, bridges, splints, or removable partial dentures. Splint therapy is quite varied and can be used as a diagnostic tool, as transitional treatment, or as long-term treatment.
3. **Behavioral changes** - During the day, consciously keep your teeth apart. Avoid holding the telephone against your shoulder by tilting your head. Sleep on your back to relieve pressure on the face. Eat a soft diet. Do not chew gum. Use good posture. Avoid some sexual practices and prolonged kissing.
4. **Equilibration of teeth** - to create a balanced bite relationship by selective grinding of the biting surfaces of the teeth
5. **Physical therapy** - to relieve muscle tension and spasms by utilizing moist heat, ice, ultrasound, electrical stimulation, jaw exercises, massage, muscle and joint manipulation, and trigger point therapy
6. **Drugs** - pain medications, anti-depressants, muscle relaxants, anti-inflammation
7. **Muscle treatments** - Myofunctional therapy, and jaw exercises
8. **Surgical** - to repair or alter the anatomic structures of the jaw joint to regain proper function or to reposition the jaw. This should be considered a last resort.

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT APPROACHES include:

1. **Stress reduction** - to decrease stress from your life that in turn causes jaw muscles to tense up and cause clenching or grinding. Relaxation therapies include biofeedback, meditation, yoga, psychological therapy, breathing exercises along with visualization exercises, support groups, and counseling.
2. **Nutrition** - to correct deficiencies in diet that affect jaw development and abnormal jaw muscle function. For acute problems, use calcium and magnesium (citrates or gluconates) as muscle relaxants - 1000mg of each at bedtime and 500 mg of each 12 hours later for as long as symptoms persist. Also take a vitamin B complex (300 mg/day), and extra pantothenic acid (200 mg/day). Eliminate caffeine from your diet, eliminate sugar if you have low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), eliminate white flour products, check for food allergies, and avoid foods that require a lot of chewing. Helpful for general support are Coenzyme Q-10 (60 mg/day), thiamine/B1, pyridoxine/B6 (50 mg at bedtime), cobalamin/B12, L-Tyrosine (500 mg/day), vitamin C (4000-8000 mg/day), and a multivitamin and mineral supplement.
3. **Homeopathy** - to stimulate the body to naturally relieve symptoms
4. **Traditional Chinese Medicine** - Modalities such as Qigong, acupuncture, acupressure, and herbs to open blocked energy channels
5. **Cranial-sacral treatment** - A gentle manipulation of the skull based on osteopathic philosophy
6. **Chiropractic treatment** – to align the spine, level the hips, and equalize leg length
7. **Consciousness training** - Alexander technique (posture, balance, movement), and Feldenkrais method (movement)
8. **Foot Zone therapy** - A form of reflexology to open blocked energy channels
9. **Herbs** - Herbal teas (willow bark, wintergreen, watercress, spikenoud, pennyroyal, pokeweed, wild black cherry, hops, passionflower, skullcap, valerian root extract, SP-14)
10. **Oral acupuncture** - Uses acupuncture points inside the mouth, and can be combined with neural therapy
11. **Cold laser therapy** - Needleless form of acupuncture

For a better understanding of what TMJ is, the treatments available, and how you must be involved, the book Taking Control of TMJ by Robert Uppgaard, DDS is available from our office for \$13.95.

Another book, TMJ - The Jaw Connection, The Overlooked Diagnosis by Greg Goddard, DDS, is available by mail by calling 800-533-5121.