

Orthodontic Department Patient Information



Information

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Temporomandibular Disorders (TMD)

What is TMD?

Temporomandibular disorder is a problem that affects the temporomandibular joints (TMJs) in your jaw. This may give you:

- pain in your jaw or the side of your face
- clicking or locking affecting your jaw joints

This may affect one or both sides of your jaw.

Sometimes you may experience:

- buzzing in the ears
- earache
- facial pain
- headaches

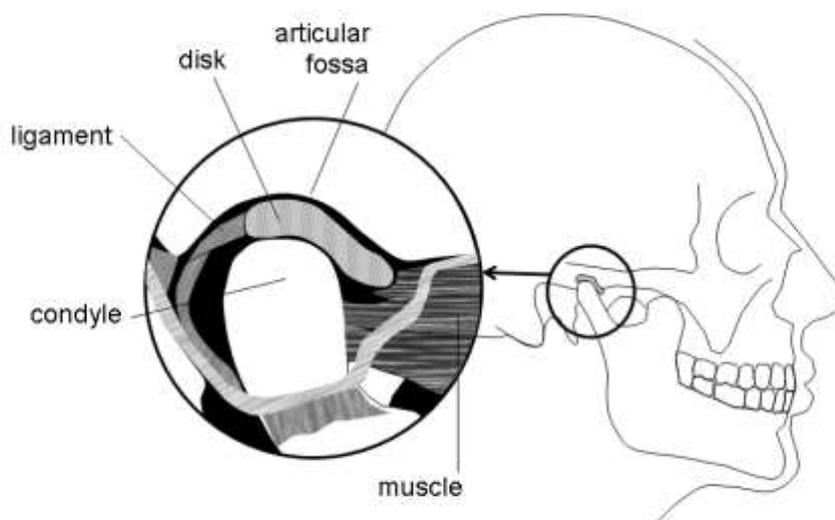
This is a common problem and may affect up to 50% of the population. It may last a few days, or many years.

It is likely that once you have this problem it may come and go. We are often not able to cure TMD, but we are able to provide you with simple measures to manage the problem if it flares up. Most patients learn how to manage their TMD themselves.

What are temporomandibular joints?

These are small joints (often called TMJs) which are situated in front of each ear and attach the lower jaw to the skull. The joint is made up of two bones that are separated by a disc of cartilage. Ligaments and many muscles surround the joint. They allow you to open and close your mouth, as well as talking, eating and swallowing.

This is a temporomandibular joint



What causes these symptoms?

Pain may be caused by the muscles in and around the jaw tightening up (muscle spasm). Sometimes muscle spasms may occur while you are sleeping, so you are not aware of it happening until you awake feeling pain, and may be due to you grinding your teeth in your sleep. The tightening of these muscles may also be the result of how you deal with stress or stressful situations.

Joint noise occurs if the cartilage moves out of its normal position. Most commonly the cartilage slips forward and a noise (clicking or popping) is made when it returns to its normal position. The cartilage is thought to slip forward because of over-use of the muscles around the jaw.

Common causes:

- Clenching or grinding of teeth
- Habits, for example biting nails, chewing gum, chewing pens and biting off sellotape
- Concentration, anxiety, physical and psychological stress (exam times)
- Trauma or injury to the jaw
- Facial deformities

Treatment

On the whole treatment is aimed at reducing the workload of the muscles, which will allow the joint and muscles to settle down. In the first instance, you will be encouraged to follow some simple steps that will rest the joint and help avoid the muscle spasm occurring.

Simple steps to manage your TMD

- Restrict your mouth opening to no more than 2 finger widths
- Try to prevent yourself from opening your mouth wide when yawning by placing a hand under your chin to support your jaw
- Identify and stop any habits including clenching or grinding. Remember this may be a 'subconscious' action and difficult to stop.
- Do not bite with your front teeth (chewing finger nails, cutting sellotape with your front teeth)
- Avoid foods that require wide mouth opening such as crusty bread, or apples. Cut your food into small pieces for ease of chewing.
- Chew evenly with your back teeth, using both sides
- Applying heat to the area twice daily (morning and evening) may be helpful; this may be a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel, or a heat pad purchased from a chemist. Take care not to burn yourself.
- Anti-inflammatory medication such as Ibuprofen can sometimes help to ease discomfort. This can be either in tablet or gel form.
- Pain relieving medication such as Paracetamol may be used in the short term
- It may be useful to consider learning some relaxation techniques to control stress and tension

What happens if these steps do not produce improvement?

Usually these simple steps are enough to relieve most symptoms (over 90% of our patients). Where these simple steps do not improve your symptoms we would wish to investigate your symptoms further and for this we would refer you to our Maxillofacial Team.

It is important to realise that jaw joint problems, although a nuisance, are not serious and may return. These simple measures can be safely repeated if this is the case.