

Exercises for Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction (TMJD)

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TMJ Dysfunction can present with various symptoms. Sometimes the TM Joint is involved but not frequently. Usually the muscles that close the lower jaw are the problem/cause.

The symptoms of TMJ Dysfunction are usually pain in the temples, ear (actually just in front), side/s of the face and mostly down the side/s of the lower jaw. Sometimes the pain is mild to moderate, but occasionally it is extreme. Essentially the pain is caused by the muscles going into "spasm" (a bit like a leg cramp). It is important to realise the pain from TMJ Dysfunction is not life threatening. It tends to be cyclic (comes and goes) and is usually related to times of stress, anxiety or tension and can often be related to extensive computer usage (usually a posture and tension issue).

TMJ Dysfunction is usually caused by excessive grinding or clenching of the teeth (para-function called bruxing). This can ultimately cause some damage to the teeth and so your dentist may suggest "sacrificial" fillings be placed to protect the teeth from excessive wear or more often a "night guard".

Often TMJ Dysfunction pain will resolve without help, particularly if the initiating factors (eg stress) are removed. However sometimes some conservative intervention is required.

As mentioned, the pain from TMJ Dysfunction usually emanates from the muscles that close the jaw. Therefore the best way to resolve the problem is to get the muscles out of "spasm" and make them less "tense".

We can accomplish this by doing certain exercises that will reduce the muscle tension or tightness and make them "fitter". Ironically, when doing these exercises, the pain will often intensify for several days but then subside over 1 – 3 weeks. While this may seem a harsh way to treat the problem, it is a bit like starting to get fit by running around an oval. You would expect to be "puffed" and have some leg muscle pain for 1-3 days but as your exercise program progresses, your legs accommodate to the exercise and your fitness increases and the pain goes away. The same scenario applies when you commence exercises to resolve TMJ Dysfunction.

During this period of considerable pain I recommend heat should/can be applied to the local painful area using a hot water bottle or a heated wheat bag. As well I suggest a combination of 500mg of paracetamol (Panadol) and 200mg of ibuprofen (Nurofen) as required every 4 to 6 hours. These medications work as analgesic and anti-inflammatory agents and provide very reasonable relief of pain.

There are three exercises I recommend (in most cases) for *muscle* TMJ Dysfunction pain. These are different to exercises for TMJ *Joint* problems. The exercises are isometric. The idea is to *try* to move your lower jaw but *not to move (open)* the jaw. More stress and tension to the muscles will be caused if you open your jaw.

Exercise One

Clench your hand by making a fist and hold it against (underneath) the front of the lower jaw (chin) in a vertical position. Push the jaw shut with your fist but try to open the jaw (but do *not* open it). You will feel the jaw muscles strain and you may feel some pain. Do this exercise for 15 seconds.

Exercise Two

Clench your right hand by making a fist and hold it against the **right** side of the lower jaw with your forearm in a horizontal position. *Try* to move your lower jaw to the **right** but do not actually move the jaw - your fist should resist any movement. You will feel different jaw muscles strain and there maybe some pain. Do this exercise for 15 seconds.

Exercise Three

Clench your left hand by making a fist and hold it against the **left** side of the lower jaw with your forearm in a horizontal position. Then *try* to move your lower jaw to the **left** but do not actually move the jaw - your fist should resist any movement. You will feel the jaw muscles strain and there maybe some pain. Do this exercise for 15 seconds.

Rotation of Exercises

Commence with Exercises 1, 2 and 3 in sequence for 15 seconds each and then repeat the sequence 5 times for the session. **Initially** do the exercise sequence (exercise 1, 2 &3) 5 times for 15 seconds (for each exercise) **three times a day** (in the morning, around midday and at night). Pick a practical time to do them (eg watching TV at night). Do the rotation sequence 3 time a day for 1 – 2 weeks. The TMJ Dysfunction pain should start to reduce after 2 – 3 days.

After 1 – 2 weeks, reduce the rotation frequency to **twice a day** – morning and night – still doing exercises 1, 2 and 3 for 15 seconds and 5 times each.

The pain should subside to about zero after 3 – 4 weeks.

After 3 – 4 weeks, reduce the rotation frequency to **once per day**. It is advisable to continue doing these exercises every day (even when the pain has gone) just to decrease the tension in the muscles.

It is important to realise that TMJ Dysfunction tends to be cyclic. The pain may return (especially in times of stress). If this happens, repeat the exercises mentioned in this

pamphlet. I advise you keep this pamphlet somewhere so you can remind yourself how to do these exercises.

Should the pain persist, return to your dentist to ensure there are no other contributing factors. Sometimes TMJ Dysfunction pain overlays other pathological pain (eg toothache) and so if pain persists, return to your dentist to have the problem/pain checked again.

Most Important

Patient compliance is most important for the prescribed exercises to succeed in reducing the pain. In other words it is up to you to do the necessary exercises. There is a tendency for patients to either not do all the exercises correctly (as described) or to stop the exercises too quickly after the pain has reduced. Therefore please follow the instructions outlined.

If you require further clarification of any of these instructions please do not hesitate to contact Dr Dale Gerke - 08 8232 5807 or go to www.drdalegerke.com