

TMJ Pain Relief Techniques

Often jaw problems resolve on their own in several weeks to months. If you have recently experienced TMJ pain and/or dysfunction, you may find relief with some or all of the following therapies.

- **Moist Heat.** Moist heat from a heat pack or a hot water bottle wrapped in a warm, moist towel can improve function and reduce pain. Be careful to avoid burning yourself when using heat.
- **Ice.** Ice packs can decrease inflammation and also numb pain and promote healing. Do not place an ice pack directly on your skin. Keep the pack wrapped in a clean cloth while you are using it. Do not use an ice pack for more than 10 - 15 minutes.
- **Soft Diet.** Soft or blended foods allow the jaw to rest temporarily. Remember to avoid hard, crunchy, and chewy foods. Do not stretch your mouth to accommodate such foods as corn on the cob, apples, or whole fruits.
- **Over the-Counter Analgesics.** For many people with TMJ Disorders, short-term use of over-the-counter pain medicines or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS), such as ibuprofen, may provide temporary relief from jaw discomfort. When necessary, your dentist or doctor can prescribe stronger pain or anti-inflammatory medications, muscle relaxants, or antidepressants to help ease symptoms.
- **Jaw Exercises.** Slow, gentle jaw exercises may help increase jaw mobility and healing. Your health care provider or a physical therapist can evaluate your condition and suggest appropriate exercises based on your individual needs.
- **Relaxation Techniques.** Relaxation and guided imagery can be helpful in dealing with the pain that accompanies TMJ dysfunction. Deep, slow breathing enhances relaxation and modulates pain sensations. Some have found yoga, massage, and meditation helpful in reducing stress and aiding relaxation.

- **Side Sleeping.** Sleep on your side using pillow support between shoulder and neck.
- **Relax Facial Muscles.** Make a concerted effort to relax your lips, and keep teeth apart.
- **Yawning.** Use your fist to support your chin as you yawn to prevent damage to the joint and prevent your jaw from locking open.

In addition, avoid:

- Jaw clenching.
- Gum chewing.
- Cradling the telephone, which may irritate jaw and neck muscles.