

TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT PAIN

The temporomandibular joints (TMJ) are two of the most frequently used joints in the body, but they probably receive the least amount of attention.

The mandible (lower jaw bone) meets with the temporal bone in front of the ear. These are hinge-type joints with cartilage on each surface, and a disc or meniscus between the bones to protect and cushion the bone surfaces.

NORMAL TMJ FUNCTION

Two movements must happen in order to open your mouth. First, the head of the mandible spins forward, which corresponds to the first 20 mm or so of the opening of the mouth.

At this point, if the mouth continues to open, the mandible and the disc move forward in the joint and out from under a large protuberance of the temporal bone.

To close the mouth, the reverse must happen. Strong ligaments and muscles must pull the disc back into place, between the two bones.

TMJ DYSFUNCTION

Pain with opening or closing the mouth can be due to improper movement of the disc between the two bones. In some instances, the disc gets stuck in front of the mandible. In this case, a click sound is often felt or heard. Unfortunately, this can then lead to degenerative changes to the joint surfaces each time the mouth is opened and closed. The later the opening click, the more the disc is out of place and the more likely it may be to lock.

Displacement of the disc can often be caused by un-coordinated contraction of the muscles or over-stretching of the ligaments that control the movement of the disc and joint. This could happen by holding the jaw open for extended periods of time or conversely, by grinding or clenching the teeth (called Bruxism). Bruxism, especially during sleep, can lead to neck, ear, facial, jaw, tooth and/or headache pain.

Habits such as smoking, leaning on the chin, chewing gum, biting the nails, etc. all place additional stress on the joints. Missing teeth,

abnormal tooth/jaw alignment and malocclusion or dental decay may also lead to problems of the TMJ, because how the two bones of the joint meet and move as one will be altered.

TMJ TREATMENT

There are many methods of therapy employed to treat TMJ related pain. Laser therapy can be used to decrease inflammation around the joint(s). Mobilization of the mandible may help to decrease compression on the joint, potentially allowing the disc to return to a better position. Inner mouth and facial massage of the muscles of chewing can also be used. Also, assessing and correcting the position/movement of the cranial and upper spinal bones is very important. Decreased motion in these areas directly affects jaw movement. A variety of exercises (eg: self mandible traction, self Masseter muscle massage and jaw relaxation techniques) can be used to compliment clinical treatment. •

OFFICE HOURS

Monday – Thursday

7am – 7pm

Friday

7am – 3:30pm

Saturday

8am – 2pm

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