

TM Joint Disorders

by Scott F. Kenward, DMD

Many people suffer from teeth grinding, headaches and tenderness of the jaw muscles and joints. Although stress is often a factor, these symptoms are usually related to problems with the jaw muscles and the jaw, or TM (TemporoMandibular) Joint.

TM Joint disorders are more easily diagnosed and treated than they were in the past. Since some types of TMJ problems can lead to more serious conditions, early detection and treatment are important. No one treatment can resolve TMJ disorders completely and treatment takes time to be effective. Your dentist can help you have a healthier and more comfortable jaw.

Trouble With Your Jaw?

TMJ disorders develop for many reasons. You might clench or grind your teeth, tightening your jaw muscles and stressing your TM Joint. Or, you may have a damaged jaw joint due to injury or disease. Whatever the cause, the results may include excessive tooth wear, clicking or grinding noises in the TM Joint, as well as pain or difficulty in opening or closing one's mouth.

Do You Have a TMJ Disorder?

- Are you aware of grinding or clenching your teeth?
- Do you wake up with sore, stiff muscles around your jaws?
- Do you have frequent headaches or neck aches?
- Does the pain get worse when you clench your teeth?
- Does stress make your clenching and pain worse?
- Does your jaw click, pop, grate, catch, or lock when you open your mouth?
- Is it difficult or painful to open your mouth, eat or yawn?
- Have you ever injured your neck, head or jaws?
- Have you had problems (such as arthritis) with other joints?
- Do you have teeth that no longer touch when you bite?
- Is it hard to use your front teeth to bite or tear food?
- Are your teeth sensitive, loose, broken or worn?

The more times you answered "yes", the more likely it is that you have a TMJ disorder. Understanding TMJ disorders will also help you understand how they're treated.

Treatment

There are various treatment options that dentists can utilize to improve the harmony and function of your jaw. Once an evaluation confirms a diagnosis of TM Joint disorder, your doctor will determine the proper course of treatment. It is important to note that treatment always works best with a team approach of self-care as well as professional care.

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