Temporomandibular Disorders (TMD)

Signs and Symptoms
TMD is a condition, not a specific disease. Temporomandibular disorders can have many different signs and symptoms, from mild to severe. Some patients may have symptoms but are still able to function fully. TMDs appear to be more common in women. Specific symptoms may include:

- Pain in or around the ear
- Tender jaw muscles
- Clicking or popping noises in jaw
- Difficulty opening or closing the jaw
- Pain when yawning or chewing
- Jaw joints that feel as if they are ‘locked,’ ‘stuck’ or ‘go out’
- Headaches

What causes TMD?
Several conditions may be linked with TMD. This often makes it difficult to pinpoint the cause of a particular case of TMD. Related conditions may include:

- Jaw or head injuries
- Diseases that affect the muscles or joints, such as arthritis
- Teeth grinding
- Stress

To determine how best to treat your condition, a complete evaluation is recommended. We may check the joints and muscles for tenderness, clicking, popping or difficulty moving. Your complete medical history may be reviewed, so it is important to keep us up-to-date. We may take X-rays or take impression to make models of your teeth to see how your bite fits together. We may also refer you to a specialist for specialized X-rays and treatment.
How the jaw joints and muscles work

The joints and muscles on each side of your jaw help open and close your mouth. These joints move in many different directions. They allow you to chew, talk and swallow. The two temporomandibular joints are among the most complex joints in the body. They work together in a delicate balance with muscles, ligaments, cartilage and your jaw bones. When a problem prevents these parts from working together properly, pain may result.

Treatment Options

For some patients, the disorders may disappear by themselves; for others, they may come and go, or may worsen over time. TMD is often managed, rather than cured. There are several ways to manage TMD. The success of treatment often depends upon us working together to find what works to relieve your symptoms.

Treatment may involve a series of steps. The step-by-step plan allows you to try simple treatment before moving on to more involved, expensive treatment. Experts generally recommend a “less is often best” approach to treating TMD.

The following self-care practices may be recommended:

- Eating softer food or avoiding foods that cause symptoms
- Minimize extreme jaw movements, such as yawning, yelling or singing
- Avoid chewing gum
- Modifying the pain with heat or ice packs
- Practicing relaxation techniques to control jaw tension
- Exercises to strengthen jaw muscles
- Medicines to reduce pain or inflammation, or to help you relax
- A nightguard or bite plate to decrease clenching or grinding
- In some cases, we may fix an uneven bite by adjusting or reshaping some teeth
- Specialist referral: orthodontist or prosthodontist