Jaw Exercises

Set aside two five-minute periods every day.

1. Close your mouth on your back teeth, resting the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth just behind your upper front teeth.
2. Run the tip of your tongue backwards onto your soft palate as far as it will go while keeping the teeth in contact.
3. Slowly open your mouth until you feel your tongue just being pulled away from the soft palate. Do not try and open your mouth further. Hold this position for five seconds and then close your mouth. Relax for five seconds.
4. Repeat these movements slowly over five minutes, in a firm but relaxed manner.

**Oral and Maxillofacial Department**

**TMJ Dysfunction Syndrome**

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**Feedback**

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care of treatment, please speak to a member of staff or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

**Telephone:** 01553 613351 or 01553 613343  
**Email:** pals@qehkl.nhs.uk  
**Letter:** PALS, The Queen Elizabeth Hospital King’s Lynn NHS Foundation Trust, Gayton Road, King’s Lynn PE30 4ET

The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.

**What Is the Temporomandibular Joint?**The joint between your upper and lower jaws is called the temporomandibular joint (TMJ). The TMJ lies just in front of the ears. The joint allows movement of your jaw open and closed and from side to side

A band of cartilage separates the bone surfaces and several ligaments are present to hold the joint together. The TMJ is attached to the muscles of mastication (Chewing Muscles)

**What Symptoms May I have?**

* Difficulty Opening your mouth Fully
* Repeated Locking of the jaw
* Swelling/tenderness over the joint
* Pain in the neck, face and chewing muscles
* Headaches or Back Pain
* Pain in your Ear

About 40% of the population suffer from some degree of symptoms

**What Causes TMJ Dysfunction Syndrome**

There is no single cause. Symptoms are usually the result of a combination of factors but are most strongly associated with stress or anxiety.

Stress often causes people to clench or grind their teeth. Most people do so while they are sleeping, and are often unaware they are doing it. If you wake in the morning with jaw stiffness, pain or tenderness when you bite together it is likely you are clenching or grinding your teeth at night

Clenching/grinding makes the jaw muscles work excessively hard, and as a result they ache and often can go into spasm, which may make it difficult for you to open your mouth fully.

When the TMJ is put under strain the band of cartilage within the joint can get pulled out of its usual position, this leads to clicking or locking of the joint. Habits such as nail biting or gum chewing can put excess strain on the joints.

Missing teeth at the back of the mouth can lead to an uneven bite, chewing on your front teeth places your jaw joint and muscles in an unnatural positon.

Many people will have missing teeth and never have symptoms because they are able to adapt to these problems. It is thought stress can reduce this ability to adapt resulting in TMJ Dysfunction Syndrome.

**What can I do to reduce my symptoms?**

Identify and stop any habits – pen chewing, nail biting, gum chewing.

Rest the jaw – stick to a soft diet, avoid chewy or tough foods and cut foods such as apples into small pieces

Avoiding opening your mouth too wide, place a hand under your chin to support your jaw when yawning

Stress is an important cause of jaw pain – regular relaxation can help improve symptoms. Try to spend 20 minutes of every day doing something you enjoy helps you relax – taking a bubble bath, reading a book, going for a walk, having a massage, doing yoga etc.

**How is TMJ Treated**

If you are missing back teeth you may be advised to visit your dentist to provide you with denture.

Jaw exercises can be used to relax the chewing muscles and strengthen the ligaments around your TMJ. When carried out regularly they can retrain the muscles so your jaw will close smoothly without clicks or jerks.

Simple painkillers are usually sufficient to relieve discomfort. Ibuprofen is particularly useful as it also reduces the inflammation in the muscles and around the TMJ.

If you clench or grind your teeth at night you may benefit from a bite-raising appliance. This is a plastic guard that fits over your lower teeth. It is worn at night to hold your jaws in position where muscles are relaxed.

Patients who suffer from chronic muscles spasm and limited mouth opening can also benefit from a short course of physiotherapy, which includes heat treatment and ultrasound.

In more severe cases steroids can be injected into the joint – although improvements are often temporary. Muscle relaxants and antidepressant medications maybe used in rare cases that do not respond to the above measures.

An Arthroscopy is a procedure to examine and wash out the TMJ. It may be considered in patients who suffer from particularly painful clicking or locking of joints. Surgery to remove or reposition the band of cartilage maybe necessary in extreme cases of TMJ Dysfunction Syndrome.