



Conservative Treatment of Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Syndrome

Behavior Modifications

1. Avoid excessive jaw opening and straining of the joint and surrounding muscles:
 - Limit jaw opening (yawning, etc) to no more than two fingers wide.
 - Maintain a soft diet for two weeks with avoidance of hard foods that require extensive chewing (bagels, steak, etc.).
 - Stop nail-biting and gum-chewing.
 - Avoid clenching of the jaw by keeping teeth slightly apart and the jaw relaxed.
 - Avoid sleeping on the affected side of the jaw.
 - Avoid playing wind, brass, and string instruments that stress or strain the jaw.
2. Apply warm compresses to the affected side of the jaw for 10 minutes at a time, at least three times per day. An ice pack may be more effective for acute pain.
3. Massage the affected muscles.
4. Consider seeing your dentist to obtain a mouth guard.

Do all of the above for the first week, then taper off and try to return to a regular diet and no medication slowly over a week or two.

Medications

The most effective drugs for TMJ management include:

1. Non-narcotic analgesic drugs such as Acetaminophen (Tylenol).
2. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as Aspirin, Ibuprofen, Naproxen and prescription strength NSAIDs.
3. Muscle relaxant drugs such as Carisoprodol (Soma) and Cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril).
4. Tricyclic anti-depressant medications such as Amitriptyline (Elavil), Nortriptyline (Pamelor), and Doxepin (Sinequan).

All medications have specific benefits and side effects. Long term use of medications should be directed and supervised by your dentist or physician to reduce the potential side effects.

Therapies

Non-drug therapies for TMJ disorders include:

1. Oral splints or mouth guards (occlusal appliances).
2. Physical therapy—along with exercises to stretch and strengthen jaw muscles, treatments might include ultrasound, moist heat and ice. Physical therapy aids in identifying and reducing contributing factors to musculoskeletal problems, reduces inflammation, restores function and promotes repair and regeneration of injured tissues.
3. Counseling—education and counseling can help you understand the factors and behaviors that may aggravate your pain, so you can avoid them. Examples include teeth clenching or grinding, leaning on your chin, or biting fingernails.