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TMJ (TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT) DISORDER

WHAT IS IT: TMJ disorder is the syndrome that occurs when the muscles in the jaw and the temporomandibular joint are out of alignment causing problems with chewing. In other words, the ligaments, muscles, bones and joints do not line up, causing pain.

SYMPTOMS: 1) A clicking, popping or grating sound when opening or closing the mouth.
2) Pain and tenderness in the jaw joints and muscles, especially when chewing.
3) Headaches, pain radiating down neck and/or dizziness.
4) Earaches.
5) The jaw locks closed or open when , especially when yawning.
6) Spasm or cramps in the jaw area.
7) Broken or cracked fillings, cold sensitive teeth and worn down teeth.

CAUSES: 1) Clenching and grinding your teeth (“bruxism”--most common cause).
2) Accidents/trauma.
3) Joint degeneration due to arthritis.
4) Developmental (natural) defects which result in misaligned teeth/jaw.
5) One-sided chewing (because teeth are missing).
6) Oral habits such as pipe clenching, pen biting or excessive gum chewing.

WHAT CAN BE DONE:

RELAX: Most people clench their teeth when under stress. Make every effort to relax your jaw muscles and keep them relaxed. Reduce stress in your life!

KEEP TEETH APART: When relaxed, your teeth should be slightly apart with the tip of your tongue resting behind the front teeth, and your lips together. The **only** time the teeth touch is during chewing and swallowing.

EATING: Avoid hard, sticky foods, including chewing gum. Eat a soft diet and cut foods into smaller pieces. Make sure you are chewing on both sides of your mouth.

AVOID EXCESSIVE JAW MOVEMENTS: You should never have to open your mouth more than two finger widths. Cup your chin when yawning. Do not open and swing your jaw from side to side beyond the point where you produce pain or discomfort.

MASSAGE: Massage your jaw joint and muscles with your fingers. Apply heat on and off in 10 minute intervals.

AVOID HABITS: Do not bite finger nails, pens or chew gum. Avoid leaning on your chin or jaw. This even applies to posturing your head to press a telephone against your shoulder.

SLEEP: Get adequate sleep. Avoid sleeping on your stomach or resting your hand or arm under your jaw. This places considerable pressure on the jaw.

MEDICATIONS: Take pain relievers and anti-inflammatory agents (Motrin, Advil, Ibuprofen, Aspirin or muscle relaxants (Robaxacet).

SPLINT: A nightguard or bite splint can be worn at night while sleeping.

ALIGNING TEETH: Teeth can be selectively shaped if the bite is incorrect. Orthodontics can realign teeth and the jaw.

REFERRAL: Physiotherapists or chiropractors can help relieve muscle pain and help your jaw open more comfortably (using manipulation, massage, biofeedback and relaxation methods).

SURGERY: If severe enough and if nothing else is helping , joint surgery can relieve symptoms. This is

rarely done and only as a last resort.

FINAL NOTE: Almost all TMJ patients get better. However, there is no easy cure because there can be an infinite number of factors contributing to jaw dysfunction. For some, a conscious effort to relax is enough to relieve symptoms significantly within a few days or weeks. For others, treatment may be more complex and results may take a few weeks to months.