

Advice for Patients with Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction Syndrome (TMJDS)

Why do I have TMJDS?

TMJDS may be due to over-activity in the muscles used for biting and chewing. This may lead to clicking in the jaw joints, face pain, headaches and difficulty opening the mouth (particularly in the morning) and difficulty eating chewy / hard foods or opening the mouth wide when yawning. Occasionally the jaw joints may feel like they are stuck but actual dislocation of the jaw joint is very rare.

It is commonly due to clenching or grinding of teeth (this may be whilst you are asleep) or by other activities such as biting fingernails, chewing pencils or gum for example. These habits frequently happen when patients are overworked, under stress, worried or anxious.

Sometimes it is due to injury to the jaw joints such as from a punch to the jaw, a road accident, surgery (such as tooth extraction or tonsillectomy) or even from a wide yawn or laugh.

The problem:

TMJDS is a very common problem which affects over two thirds of people at least once in their lifetime. It is very similar to a sprained wrist, twisted ankle or muscle cramp and like these injuries it requires the injured joints and muscles to be rested as much as possible to allow them to heal.

While the severity of symptoms varies from patient to patient the majority of cases are mild and self-limiting. In most cases symptoms settle with either no or very little active treatment being required. For most patients it is a nuisance rather than a significant health problem although for some patients with more severe symptoms a specific course of treatment may be required.

What should I do?

- Avoid eating hard or chewy foods e.g. toffee, or tough meat.
- Avoid eating foods that require you to open your mouth wide e.g. whole apples (slice them first), large hamburgers or crusty bread rolls.
- Avoid opening your mouth wide – support your chin when yawning.
- Stop chewing gum, or finger nails or pencils and pens.
- Try to notice if you clench or grind your teeth when stressed or when concentrating- if so STOP.
- If your jaw clicks don't keep making it click on purpose just to see if it is better yet.
- TMJDS is worse when stressed accept that stress is damaging your health and try to reduce your exposure to stress or find ways to help you relax e.g. exercise, aromatherapy, massage etc. Different things work and appeal to different people, do what feels right to you.

Simple treatment you can do at home:

- Concentrate on opening your mouth in a straight line - placing the tip of your tongue at the back of the roof of your mouth and then opening will help you achieve this.
- If you have muscle pain place a warm hot water bottle wrapped in a towel for no more than 5 minutes over the affected side of your face. Then place a bag of ice or frozen peas wrapped in a towel for no more than 5 minutes on the same area. Be careful not to burn or freeze your skin when doing this.
- It is OK to use simple over-the-counter painkillers on bad days but never exceed the recommended dose.

Treatment you may be prescribed by the hospital:

- If you have a great deal of muscle pain / spasm due to stress you may be prescribed a course of tablets to help your condition. These tablets are only painkillers and must be taken as directed by your hospital doctor or dentist. The tablet dose may need to be altered and are not for long term use.
- If you are grinding your teeth so much you are damaging them it may be helpful to have a simple "gum shield" type mouth splint, made by your dentist, to protect them.
- If you have a lot of joint pain and especially if you have difficulty opening your mouth properly you may be offered a steroid injection into the affected joint(s).
- If you have severe difficulty opening your mouth properly you may require an operation on your joint(s). Your doctor will fully discuss this with you if they think it is necessary for you.

Wristbands

When you are in hospital it is essential to wear a wristband at all times to ensure your safety during your stay.

The wristband will contain accurate details about you on it including all of the essential information that staff need to identify you correctly and give you the right care. All hospital patients including babies, children and older people should wear the wristband at all times.

If you do not have a wristband whilst in hospital, please ask a member of staff for one. If it comes off or is uncomfortable, ask a member of staff to replace it.

Smoking

Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is a smoke-free organisation. You are not permitted to smoke or use e-cigarettes in any of the hospital buildings or grounds.

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of your forthcoming treatment and answers to many of the commonly asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation please ask.

If you need this information in another format or language, please ask a member of staff to arrange this for you.

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