

Physical Therapist's Guide to Temporomandibular Joint Disorder

Temporomandibular joint disorder (or "dysfunction") (TMD) is very common; more than 10 million people in the United States have it. Jaw pain is one of the symptoms of TMD. It's important for you to know that jaw pain also can be a symptom of heart attack. **Seek medical care immediately if jaw pain is accompanied by:**

- ♥ Chest pain
- ♥ Shortness of breath
- ♥ Dizziness
- ♥ Left arm pain
- ♥ Numbness in your left arm
- ♥ Nausea

What Is Temporomandibular Joint Disorder?

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) guides jaw movement. Problems with the TMJ are known as temporomandibular joint disorder or dysfunction (TMD). TMD is very common; more than 10 million people in the United States have it. TMD can be caused by:

* Bad posture habits. One of the reasons TMD is so common is because many of us spend a great deal of time sitting at a desk, where we often hold our head too far forward as we work. But there are many other kinds of bad posture. Sitting in the car for a long commute, working at a checkout station, cradling a telephone receiver against the same shoulder for long periods of time, always carrying your child on the same hip—all can place the head in an awkward position and cause jaw problems. The "forward head position" puts a strain on the muscles, disk, and ligaments of the TMJ. The jaw is forced to "rest" in an opened position, and the chewing muscles become overused.

- Chronic jaw clenching at night("bruxism"). Many people clench their jaws at night while they sleep, usually because of stress. This puts a strain on the TMJ because of the constant strain on the joint and surrounding muscles.
- Problems with teeth alignment("malocclusion"). If your teeth come together in an unusual way, greater stress is placed on your TMJ.
- Fracture. In a traumatic accident involving the face or head, a fracture to the lower jaw may result, and even when the fracture is fully healed, TMJ stiffness and pain may remain.
- Surgery. Following surgery to the face and jaw, there may be a loss in mobility and function of the TMJ.
- Trismus ("lockjaw"). This condition—where jaw muscles spasm and the jaw cannot be fully opened—can be both a cause and a symptom of TMD. Other causes of trismus include trauma to the jaw, tetanus, and radiation therapy to the face and neck.

How Does it Feel?

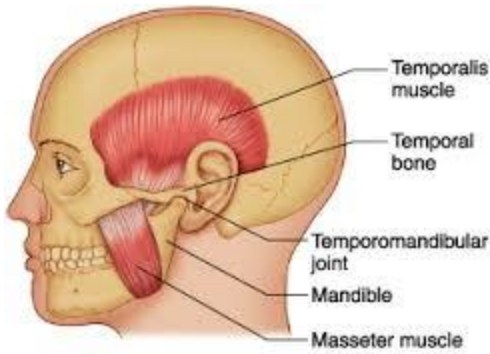
TMD symptoms include:

- Jaw pain
- Jaw fatigue
- Difficulty opening your mouth to eat or talk
- Ringing in your ears
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Popping sounds in your jaw
- Neck pain
- Locking jaw

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How Is It Diagnosed?

To identify the cause of the symptoms, your physical therapist will first:

- Review your medical history, and discuss any previous surgery, fractures, or other injuries to your head, neck, or jaw.
- Conduct a physical examination of your jaw and neck.

The physical therapist will evaluate your posture and how your cervical spine—your neck—moves. The therapist will examine the TMJ to find out how well it can open and whether there are any abnormalities in jaw motion. The therapist might place his or her hand in your mouth in order to examine your jaw movement.

If, after the examination, the physical therapist suspects that your pain is a result of the position ("alignment") of your teeth, the therapist will refer you to your dentist for further examination.

How Can a Physical Therapist Help?

Your physical therapist can help restore the natural movement of your jaw and decrease your pain. If the therapist determines that your jaw pain is not related to teeth alignment, the therapist will select treatments that will work best for you. Treatments used by physical therapists for TMD include:

Posture education. If your therapist finds that you sit with your head in an increased forward position, this means that you are placing greater strain on the muscles beneath your chin, causing the lower jaw to pull back and the mouth to be in an open position even when resting, and increasing stress on the TMJ. You also might be overworking the jaw muscles to force the jaw closed so your mouth isn't open all the time. Your therapist will teach you to be aware of your posture so that you can improve the resting position of your jaw, head, neck, breastbone, and shoulder blades when you're sitting and walking.

Improve jaw movement. Physical therapists use skilled hand movements called manual therapy to increase movement and relieve pain in tissues and joints. Your therapist also might use manual therapy to stretch the jaw in order to restore normal joint and muscle flexibility (how supple your muscles are) or break up scar tissues ("adhesions") that sometimes develop when there is constant injury.

Your physical therapist will teach you special "low-load" exercises—exercises that don't exert a lot of pressure on your TMJ but that can strengthen the muscles of the jaw and restore a more natural, pain-free motion.

Special pain treatments. In addition to manual therapy, if your pain is severe, your physical therapist may decide to use treatments such as electrical stimulation or ultrasound to reduce pain.

If your TMD is caused by teeth alignment problems, your physical therapist can refer you to a dentist who specializes in TMD who can correct your teeth alignment with special appliances, such as "bit guards," that create a natural resting position of the jaw to relax the TMJ, relieve pain, and improve jaw function.

Can this Injury or Condition be Prevented?

Maintaining good sitting posture is key to preventing TMJ problems. Your physical therapist will show you how to maintain good sitting posture to prevent future episodes of TMD.

General Tips:

- Avoid repetitive chewing, such as gum chewing
- Avoid smoking
- Avoid opening the jaw too wide
- Avoid eating hard or chewy foods
- Maintain good oral hygiene and tooth health
- Avoid sleeping on your stomach, which forces the neck to rotate to one direction in order to maintain an open airway, increasing stress on the TMJ

At work:

- Your work should be directly in front of you and not off to the side where you are forced to look in one direction for long periods of time.
- Are you on the phone for long periods of time? Use a headset that allows the neck and jaw to remain in a restful("neutral") position.

If you are having symptoms of TMD call Pearson Physical Therapy at 308-872-5800 for an assessment.



2nd Annual Weight Loss Challenge Final Weigh-ins

Final weigh-ins are the week of March 17-21(during regular business hours). The top three losers will be awarded gift certificates courtesy of Grocery Kart, Schmick's Market, Hogan's Sporting Goods & Bow Booterie. We will announce winners in the next newsletter.



PRODUCT HIGHLIGHT

Transcendence Cream

Skin care moisturizer and beauty cream that helps heal burns, cuts, scrapes and scars. Formulated with royal jelly & propolis that speeds healing. Transcendence Cream is a natural hair conditioner. This cream rejuvenates skin cells, reduces wrinkles & can be used to remove wrinkles.

Available at Pearson Physical Therapy



FREE Stride Right Clinic

March 29, 2014

8 am - 12 pm

Open To All Interested Individuals

**Becky Pearson, MPT and
Andrew Mason, MPT, CSCS**

PEARSON PHYSICAL THERAPY is offering a FREE Clinic for anyone who is interested in having a running evaluation.

This 30 minute session will include:

- Individual screening for flexibility, strength, and posture impairment.
- Foot, shoe and gait assessment with education and recommendations regarding foot type and shoes as indicted
- Running screen with video feedback and instruction for refinement of technique as needed (using model comparisons to aid in learning)
- Tips for training management to maximize conditioning progression and avoid overuse injury

Call 308-872-5800 for more information or to reserve a spot.