

What is Temporomandibular Joint Disorder?

Temporomandibular joint disorder of dysfunction (TMD) is a common condition that limits the natural functions of the jaw, such as opening the mouth and chewing. It currently affects more than 10 million people in the United States. It is sometimes incorrectly referred to simply as “TMJ”, which represents the name of the joint itself. TMD affects more women than men and is most often diagnosed in individuals aged 20 to 40 years. Its causes range from poor posture, chronic jaw clenching, poor teeth alignment, to fracture or conditions such as lockjaw, where the muscles around the jaw spasm and reduce the opening of the mouth. Physical therapists help people with TMD ease pain., regain normal jaw movement and reduce daily stress on the jaw.

The symptoms of TMD can be temporary or last for years. Jaw pain is the most common symptom. CAUTION. Jaw pain can also be a symptom of heart attack. Seek medical care immediately if the jaw pain is accompanied by; chest pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, left arm pain, numbness in the left arm, and nausea. TMD can cause the jaw to lock or get stuck in a certain position. You may experience headaches, feel pain when chewing certain foods, or have difficulty opening your mouth.

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, and locking jaw.

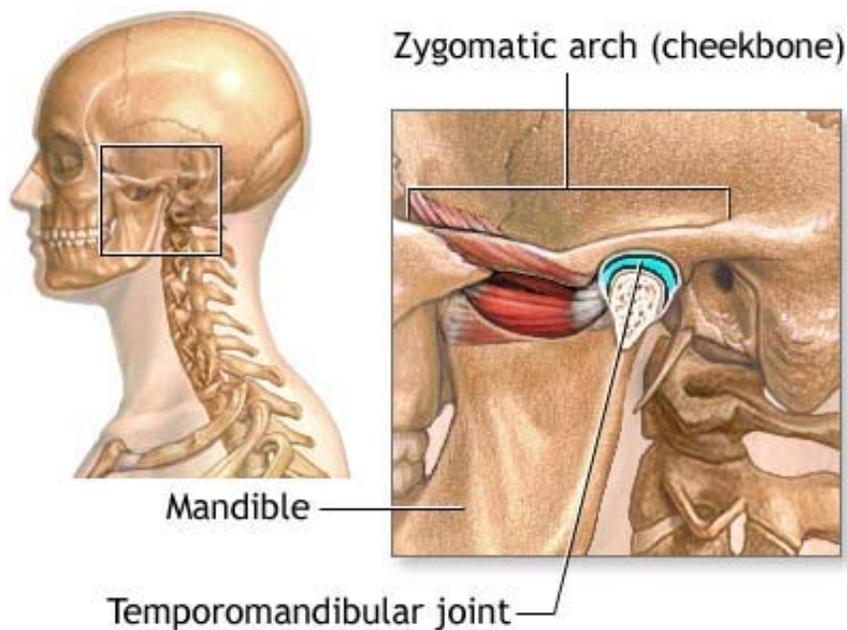
“Hi Steve! I spoke with Hannah’s mother Cindy last week and she raved about your fine care! She said that Hannah’s jaw pain and migraines are virtually cured and that if Hannah senses some symptoms coming on, she will do the recommended exercises and stay pain free. Cindy went out of her way to tell me how pleased they are with you and the results you provided. Hey, that makes me look good! I really appreciate getting to work with you.”

-Tom S, DDS.



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Many confuse TMD with TMJ– TMD is dysfunction of the Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ)

How is TMD diagnosed?

To identify the cause of your symptoms, your physical therapist may; review your medical history, and discuss any previous surgery, fractures or other injuries to your head, neck or jaw; ask you to describe your pain, including headaches, and observe any pain patterns in the neck and TMJ; conduct a physical examination of your jaw and neck, including the soft tissue and muscles in the area.

Your physical therapist will evaluate your posture and observe your cervical spine. Your physical therapist will examine your TMJ to find out how well it functions and whether there are any abnormalities in your jaw motion.

What Causes TMD?

Temporomandibular joint disorder (TMD) is a common condition that limits the natural function of the jaw, such as opening the mouth and chewing, and can cause pain. The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is a hinge joint that connects your jaw to your skull in front of your ear. The TMJ guides jaw movement and allows you to open and close your mouth and move it side to side to talk, yawn, or chew. 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 heads too far forward as we work. But there are many kinds of bad posture. Sitting in the car for a long commute, working at a checkout station, 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, disc, and ligaments of the TMJ.
- **Chronic jaw clenching or grinding.** Many people clench their jaws at night while they sleep, usually because of stress. Some clench their teeth throughout the day as well, especially dealing with stressful situations. This puts a strain on the jaw muscles as well as increasing wear and tear on the teeth and jaw joints.
- **Problems with teeth alignment (“malocclusion”).** If your teeth are positioned in an unusual way, potentially greater stress is placed on the TMJ when performing everyday jaw motions, such as chewing.
- **Fracture.** In a traumatic accident involving the face or head, a fracture to the lower jaw may result and cause TMD. Even when the fracture is fully healed, TMJ stiffness and pain may remain.
- **Surgery.** Individuals may experience a loss of TMJ mobility and function following certain kinds of surgery to the face and jaw.
- **Trismus (“lockjaw”).** This condition– where the 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, radiation therapy to the face and neck, or following dental intervention.
- **Displacement** of the disc or the soft tissue cushion located between the ball and socket of the TMJ, which causes popping or clicking of the jaw, and frequently pain.
- **Arthritis** in the TMJ.

October is National PT Month!

In celebration of National Physical Therapy Month, 21st Century Rehab would like to say "Thank You" to our dedicated Physical Therapists and Physical Therapy Assistants!

No matter what area of the body ails you— neck, back knee, physical therapists have an established history of helping individuals improve the quality of their life. A physical therapist can help you move freely again without pain and discomfort and feeling renewed and ready to move on. They can help you prevent an injury all together.

Because physical therapists receive specialized training in a variety of sciences, they understand how the human body works and how to get you moving again.

Whether you are living with diabetes, or recovering from a stroke, a fall or a sports injury, a physical therapist is a trusted healthcare professional who will work closely with you to evaluate your condition and develop an effective, personalized plan of care.

A How Can a Physical Therapist Help?

Your physical therapist can help you restore the natural movement of your jaw and decrease your pain. Based on your condition, your therapist will select treatments that will work best for you. Your treatments may include:

Posture Education. If you sit with your head in an increased forward position, you are placing greater strain on the muscles beneath your chin, causing the lower jaw to pull back and the mouth to be in open position even when resting, 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 physical 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.

Improving Jaw Movement. Your physical therapist will teach you special exercises to restore the normal midline, pain free movement of the jaw, free of popping and clicking. The exercises will also help you to break bad habits of your jaw.

Working with other healthcare providers. Your physical therapist will work closely with your dentist, especially if the need for a bite guard or splint is needed to decrease the pain in your joint and protect your teeth if you clench or grind your teeth at night.

Prevention. Maintaining good posture is one of the keys to preventing TMJ problems. Your physical therapist will show you how to maintain better posture to prevent future episodes of TMD.

- Place any work you are focusing on 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.
- Place your computer monitor at eye level so you don't have to look up, down, or to the side throughout day.
- If you use a phone at work for long periods, use a headset.
- Avoid repetitive chewing, such as chewing gum.
- 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.

All physical therapists are prepared through education and experience to treat a variety of conditions or injury. Steve Cassabaum, DPT founder and president of 21st Century Rehab, PC has over 25 years of experience in helping people with TMD. He has worked hard to share his treatment philosophy with all the physical therapists at 21st Century Rehab, PC.

What's Your Story?

"I started coming to 21st Century Rehab in early autumn 2015 because I had a problem involving TMJ. Jaw pain on the left side of my face; a congested feeling in my ear; and pain radiating down my shoulder and into my hip were the symptoms.

My dentist and medical doctor tried everything from an incredibly expensive- not covered by insurance- mouth guard, to an MRI and prescription muscle relaxants. Nothing worked. Discovering the arthritis drug Bextra gave me temporary relief from the congested feeling around my ear, but Bextra was removed from the market by the FDA.

After daily discomfort from my TMJ that lasted about seven years, Steve at 21st Century Rehab relieved the majority of that discomfort in about three months. I don't understand why physical therapy is not the first line treatment for TMJ. All of the money and time I wasted with professionals that were not experts in working with this condition left me feeling angry and upset.

I thanked Steve personally and encouraged him to reach out to more dental clinics, chiropractors and MDs so other patient with TMJ don't suffer like I did for such a long period of time. All that pain and suffering is unnecessary. The medical model needs to change involving TMJ. The least invasive and most effective treatment option should be tried first; that option is physical therapy." -Lori R.

The well Report.... the way to Live well !



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