TMJ Dysfunction

TMJ self-care is an essential part of the patient’s treatment. It should be designed to meet the individual patient’s treatment objectives. Below are 12 self-care tips that have been effective in helping patients manage their TMJ problems.

1 **Rest the muscles and joints** – this will allow healing. Rest includes:
   - A soft food diet – avoid crunchy, chewy foods like hard nuts, chips, carrots, hard breads.
   - Avoid chewing gum
   - No clenching or tensing – learn to say “teeth apart, face and jaw relaxed”.

2 **Avoid opening the mouth too wide** – this protects the joints and prevents them from locking open.
   - Yawn against pressure
   - Eat small bites
   - Avoid general anesthesia when possible
   - Avoid long dental visits, and rest frequently during all dental procedures

3 **Apply cold** for 5-10 minutes for severe pain, new injuries (less than 72 hours), and re-injury.

4 **Apply moist heat** for 20 minutes for mild to moderate pain. This increases circulation and muscle relaxation and promotes healing.

5 **Use heat and ice** for quick relief from muscle pain. Apply heat for 5 seconds, followed by ice for 5 seconds and repeat 4-5 times.

6 **Massage** the jaw and temple muscles. This stimulates circulation, relaxes muscles and decreases soreness.

7 **Maintain good posture** – avoid a forward head position which may increase jaw and neck muscle activity and soreness.

8 **Telephone use** – do not cradle the phone on the shoulder; this irritates jaw and neck muscles.

9 **Sleeping position** – sleep on your side with pillow support between the neck and shoulders and soft support along the face and jaw; or sleep on your back with the neck curve supported.

10 **Exercise** 20-30 minutes at a time, 3-4 times a week. Choose low impact exercises to minimize pressure on the joints.

11 **Over-the-counter** medications are helpful for pain and inflammation. Take 2 aspirin or ibuprofen 4 times daily, according to directions.

12 **Good nutrition** promotes joint and muscle healing.