

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.

UCSD Student Health
Call 534-8089 for an appointment