

MAXILLOFACIAL UNIT

INFORMATION AND ADVICE FOR PATIENTS WITH TMJDS

INFORMATION

You have been given this information sheet because you have been diagnosed as having temporomandibular joint dysfunction syndrome (TMJDS). 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 overwhelming majority of cases are mild and self limiting and settle with little if any active treatment being required. For most patients it is a nuisance rather than a significant health problem although for patients with more severe symptoms a specific course of treatment may be prescribed.

TMJDS may be due to over activity in the muscles used for biting and chewing which may lead to clicking in the jaw joints, face pain, headaches and difficulty opening the mouth (particularly on waking up in the morning), eating hard or chewy foods or opening the mouth wide such as when yawning. Occasionally, the jaw joints may feel as if they are stuck but actual dislocation of the jaw joint is very rare. It is commonly due to clenching or grinding of the teeth (often during sleep), biting fingernails or chewing pencils etc. These habits frequently happen when patients are over worked, under stress, worried or anxious. Sometimes it is due to an 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.

ADVICE

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

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 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 very careful not to burn or freeze your skin when doing this
- It's OK to use simple over-the-counter pain killers 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 and especially if it is felt that this may be due to stress etc after fully discussing your condition with you you may be prescribed a course of tablets to help relax you and your face muscles – these tablets are not pain killers and they must be taken strictly as directed by your hospital doctor/dentist – it may be necessary to alter the dose or type of medication but you will NOT be on tablets for a long time and you will NOT become addicted to them
- If you are grinding your teeth so much you are damaging them you may be made a simple “gum shield” type mouth splint to wear 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) you will be fully consulted and informed and your written consent obtained before any operation is performed

MAXILLOFACIAL UNIT

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR TREATMENT PLEASE TELL US SO THAT WE CAN EXPLAIN THINGS TO YOU