

Self Care Tips for Temporomandibular Disorders (TMD) ©



Self-care is an essential part of your treatment. The success of our treatment will depend, in large part, on the way **YOU** treat injured areas. You will find in the following list, therefore, an easy way to actively participate in your treatment as well as improve your current symptoms.

- **Avoid activities which move your jaw out of the resting position . . .**
 - ...avoid chewing your lips and/or cheeks.
 - ...avoid biting your nails.
 - ...avoid holding objects in your mouth (pens, pencils, etc.)

“LIPS TOGETHER AND TEETH APART”

---as much as possible! (your teeth should only contact during the day while eating and swallowing).

- **Avoid full opening of your mouth...**
 - ...avoid food like apples and large burgers or sandwiches (unless they are cut into smaller pieces).
 - ...avoid yawning too wide (place your tongue on the roof of your mouth when yawning to avoid excessive opening).
- **Avoid excessive pressure on the TM joint...**
 - ...do not lean your chin on your hand.
 - ...sleep on your back, if possible, avoiding added stress on your jaw joints.
 - ...avoid cradling the phone against your ear (use light weight head-sets instead).
 - ...do not chew food with your front teeth.
- **Avoid prolonged use of your joints...**
 - ...avoid foods that are chewy, hard or tough, or any other food that will require prolonged chewing (e.g. steaks, hard rolls, toffee, bagels, raw carrots, ice cubes, etc.)
 - ...avoid chewing gum
 - ...avoid pushing forward (protruding) your lower jaw unnecessarily.
- **Take care of your neck...**
 - ...maintain good posture, avoiding head-forward posture which may increase jaw and neck muscle activity and soreness.
 - ...vary your activities approximately every 10 minutes to give you neck a break from sustained positions (especially computer desk work).
 - ...avoid sleeping on your stomach.
 - ...use a pillow which supports your neck adequately.
- **Heat/Ice...**
 - ...apply ice for severe pain and recent injuries (less than 72 hours).
 - ...apply moist heat on tense muscles for 10 minutes, then lightly brush the painful area with an ice cube. Re-warm the area for 1-2 minutes. Repeat ice and heat combination 4-5 times.
- **Medical/Dental care...**
 - ...always advise your practitioner about your temporomandibular disorder when proceeding with dental or medical care.

Remembering “**LIPS TOGETHER AND TEETH APART**” is an important step in breaking the daytime habit of clenching and/or grinding teeth. In fact, many people are unaware they even have the habit until it has been pointed out to them. This simple step will help relax tense and taut muscles and promote healing of damaged temporomandibular joints. Times when you are most likely to clench or grind your teeth are when driving, physical exertion (sports), and when you are under emotional tension or stress. During these times you should repeat to yourself:

“**LIPS TOGETHER AND TEETH APART...**” By sealing your lips and gently blowing or puffing air, you will automatically separate your teeth and simultaneously relax your jaw and facial muscles. Remember that you have had this habit for a long time, and it will not vanish overnight. You must persevere and practice this exercise every time you find your teeth clenched together.