



## Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Syndrome

**Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) syndrome** occurs when the muscles, joints, and ligaments of the jaw move out of alignment.

### Signs & Symptoms

- Pain is felt in or around an ear. Pain in the jaw spreads to the face or the neck and shoulders. Pain is felt when you open and close your mouth or you can't fully open the mouth.
- Headaches. Toothaches.



*With TMJ, a "clicking" noise occurs when opening the mouth or biting.*

### Causes

- Clenching or grinding the teeth (bruxism).
- Poor posture or sleeping in a way that misaligns the jaw or creates tension in the neck.
- Stress in life when it results in muscle tension in the neck and shoulder.
- Incorrect or uneven bite or injury to the jaw.

### Treatment

- Wearing a mouthguard or bite plate.
- Physical therapy.
- Medicine to reduce swelling. One type is given through a shot in the jaw joint. Muscle relaxants for a short period of time.
- Counseling if the TMJ is caused by stress.
- Surgery is a last resort.

### Questions to Ask

Does severe pain cause trouble eating? Or, can you not open or close your mouth?



NO

Do you have **signs and symptoms of TMJ** listed in the left column?



NO



### Self-Care / Prevention

Self-care measures may reduce the need for medical treatment.

- Massage the jaw area several times a day, first with your mouth open, then with it closed.
- Wear a mouth protector or mouth device, as prescribed by your doctor or dentist.
- Take medication, as prescribed.
- Don't chew gum or eat foods that are hard to chew.
- Try not to open your jaw too wide when you yawn and when you bite into foods, such as an apple, triple-decker sandwich, etc.
- To help reduce muscle spasms that can cause pain, apply moist heat to the jaw area. Use a washcloth soaked in warm water.
- If stress is a factor, use relaxation exercises.
- Take steps to reduce the risk of jaw injuries.
- Maintain a good posture.



#### Get more information from:

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR)

[www.nidcr.nih.gov](http://www.nidcr.nih.gov)