

TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT PAIN

WHAT IS IT AND WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR IT?

The Temporomandibular Joint or TMJ is one of the most frequently used joints in the body. It forms the connection between your jaw bone and your skull. Disorders of this joint can lead to increased pain and other symptoms.



What is the TMJ?

The TMJ is the connection between your jaw bone and your skull. If you feel in front of your ears and open your mouth you can feel this joint on either side of your head. The end of your jaw bone fits into a groove in the bones of your skull. The jaw bone will glide and rotate to allow you to open and close your mouth.

What Causes TMJ Disorders?

There is not one cause for disorders of the TMJ. Symptoms may be due to a trauma to the joint like being hit in the head, arthritis, muscular problems, or displacement of the joint.

What are the Symptoms of TMJ Disorders?

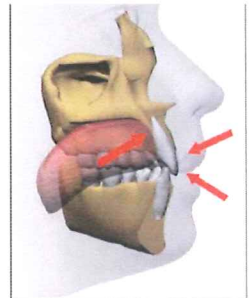
The first symptom is increased pain in or around the joint. This pain may be constant or may come and go with movement of the joint. Other symptoms include limited ability to open or close the mouth, clicking sounds or locking of the joint, headaches, neck or face pain, swelling, or difficulty swallowing.

What Treatments are Available?

- Conservative treatments such as lifestyle changes, pain medications, stabilization splints or bite guards, and Physical Therapy.
- Irreversible treatments include surgeries, repositioning splints or "orthotics", or orthodontic procedures. Typically these procedures are performed after conservative measures have failed.

What Can I Do at Home?

Lifestyle changes can help to decrease any symptoms you may be experiencing, particularly by maintaining a resting position as shown in this picture. The lips remain closed with the teeth apart. The tip of the tongue is touching the roof mouth,



just behind the front teeth. Be more aware of activities that increase your pain and work to avoid stressors in your life. Changing your diet and temporarily switching to soft foods and avoiding foods requiring a lot of chewing may help. You should also avoid large movements of the jaw, chewing gum, or wide yawning.

What Exercises Can I Do?

Rocabado's 6x6x6 exercises can help you to improve your posture, stretch tight tissues, and decrease your pain. There are 6 exercises to be performed 6 repetitions during 6 sessions per day.

- Rest Position and Breathing: While maintaining the rest position described above breathe 6 times through your nose.
- Controlled Opening: Maintaining the rest position, open your mouth in a pain-free range or until your tongue leaves the roof of your mouth.
- Rhythmic Stabilization: While in the rest position apply gentle resistance with hand to the left and right of the jaw as well as to opening and closing motions.
- Neck flexion: With your hands behind your neck nod your head up and down.
- Neck extension: With your head still tuck your chin, pushing your head back.
- Shoulder Retraction: Pull your shoulders back and down while squeezing your shoulder blades together.

What Can Physical Therapy Do?

A physical therapist can prescribe exercises and stretches that address your specific problems. They can also provide treatments that can help to reduce your pain. If you believe you do have a TMJ disorder you should first consult your physician, dentist, or a physical therapist before beginning any exercise program.

