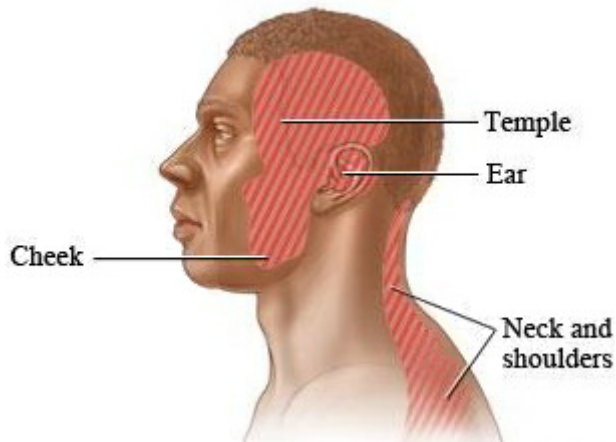


Temporomandibular Disorder: After Your Visit

Your Care Instructions



Temporomandibular (TM) disorders are a problem with the muscles and joints that connect your jaw to your skull. They cause pain when you open your mouth, chew, or yawn. You may feel this pain on one or both sides. A very common focus of pain is in the ear. Many patients come to the ear specialist quite convinced their pain is from an ear infection.

What are the symptoms?

- Ear pain
- Sore jaw muscles
- Temple/cheek pain
- Jaw popping/clicking
- Locking of the jaw
- Difficulty in opening the mouth fully
- Frequent head/neck aches

TM disorders are often caused by tight jaw muscles. The tightness can be caused by clenching or grinding your teeth. This may happen when you have a lot of stress in your life.

If you lower your stress, you may be able to stop clenching or grinding your teeth. This will help relax your jaw and reduce your pain.

You may also be able to do some things at home to feel better. But if none of this works, your doctor may prescribe medicine to help relax your muscles and control the pain.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Put a warm, moist cloth or heating pad set on low on your jaw. Do this for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Put a thin cloth between the heating pad and your skin.
- Avoid hard or chewy foods that cause your jaws to work very hard. Examples include popcorn, jerky, tough meats, chewy breads, gum, and raw apples and carrots.
- Choose softer foods that are easy to chew. These include eggs, yogurt, and soup.
- Cut your food into small pieces. Chew slowly.
- If your jaw gets too painful to chew, or if it locks, you may need to puree your food for a few days or weeks.
- To relax your jaw, repeat this exercise for a few minutes every morning and evening. Watch yourself in a mirror. Gently open and close your mouth. Move your jaw straight up and down. But don't do this if it makes your pain worse.
- Get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week to relieve stress. Walking is a good choice. You also may want to do other activities, such as running, swimming, cycling, or playing tennis or team sports.
- Do not:
 - Hold a phone between your shoulder and your jaw.
 - Open your mouth all the way, like when you sing loudly or yawn.
 - Clench or grind your teeth, bite your lips, or chew your fingernails.
 - Clench things such as pens, pipes, or cigars between your teeth.

Additional Instructions:

- To reduce inflammation in the jaw joint, an anti-inflammatory medication can be helpful. If your body tolerates these medicines, you can take ibuprofen or naproxen daily according to the label dosing recommendations for 7-14 days.
- If the ear and jaw joint pain are not improving with conservative treatments using moist heat for 30 minutes several times daily and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications (like ibuprofen or naproxen) taken regularly for 1-2 weeks, you may consider talking to your dentist about fitting an occlusal splint, also known as a TMJ splint. These splints are worn at night to cushion the jaw joint and are especially useful if there is a history of grinding or clenching the teeth at night.