

# What to Do When You Have Pain in Your TMJ (Jaw Joint)

Pain in the TMJ (temporomandibular joint) can be frustrating and uncomfortable, but there are effective steps you can take to manage symptoms and prevent flare-ups.

## What Is TMJ Pain

Your TMJ (temporomandibular joint) is the joint that connects your lower jaw to your skull, allowing you to talk, chew, and yawn. TMJ pain can feel like:

- Aching in or around your jaw
- Clicking or popping when opening your mouth
- Headaches or earaches
- Tightness in the jaw or neck

## What to Do at Home

### Rest Your Jaw

- Your jaw muscles are like any other muscle in your body. If they are sore, then they need to rest.
- Eat soft foods, i.e. yogurt, scrambled eggs, smoothies, or soup.
- Avoid chewing gum.
- Avoid biting on hard things, i.e. your nails, pens, etc.
- Avoid eating tough, sticky foods that require a lot of chewing, i.e. dried fruit or meat.
- Avoid opening your mouth too wide when biting into your food, i.e. a sandwich.
- Avoid clenching or grinding your teeth.

### Manage Stress

- TMJ pain is often linked to stress and tension. Try meditation, breathing exercises, or yoga.
- Make sure you are eating a healthy, well-balanced diet and getting enough sleep.
- If you find yourself clenching or grinding during the day, focus on keeping your lips together, teeth slightly apart, and your tongue rested gently against the roof of your mouth.

### Use Moist Heat or Ice

- **Heat:** Apply a warm, moist compress to the sore muscles for 15-20 minutes to help loosen up tight muscles.
- **Ice:** Apply an ice pack for 15-20 minutes to reduce inflammation, especially after a flare-up.
- Alternate between heat and ice (i.e. heat, ice, heat, ice, heat) 2-3 times a day if possible.

### Take Appropriate Medication

- NSAIDs such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve) can reduce pain and inflammation.
  - Follow dosage instructions on the label unless otherwise directed by your dentist or physician.
  - Avoid NSAIDs if you have stomach issues, kidney problems, are on blood thinners, have allergies or have been told by your healthcare provider to avoid these medications—check with your healthcare provider if unsure.
- If necessary, your dentist may prescribe a steroid, i.e. a Medrol dose pack to help reduce inflammation or a muscle relaxer, i.e. Flexeril to help if your pain is muscle related.

### Wear Your Appliances

- If you already have an oral appliance, i.e. occlusal guard, night guard, splint, etc. continue to wear it as directed by your dentist.
- Depending on your situation your dentist may recommend a temporary appliance, i.e. an Aqualizer or a Quick Splint. Use these appliances as directed by your dentist.
- If your oral appliance is causing pain or making your pain worse, please call our office.

TMJ pain can be caused by muscles, bones, nerves, ligaments, or tendons. In order for your dentist to properly treat your issues, it may be necessary to do more diagnostic testing and imaging. At Golden Hill Family Dentistry, we offer TMJ evaluations and Dental Facial Analyses to help develop a plan to treat your TMJ issues.

Your comfort and health are important to us—don't hesitate to call or text our office at (303) 237-1553 if you have questions or concerns!