



## SELF-CARE TIPS FOR TMD PATIENTS

Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction (TMD) is a common dental problem. Many patients are able to successfully manage TMD symptoms with self-care. In some cases, the symptoms of TMD are severe enough that a referral to a dentist specializing in TMD may be required. Below are 12 self-care tips that have been effective in helping patients manage their TMD problem.

1. **Rest the muscles and joints.** This will allow healing. Rest includes:
  - a. Eating soft foods – Avoid crunchy and chewy foods like hard nuts, chips, carrots, and hard breads.
  - b. No gum chewing
  - c. Avoid clenching or tensing – Learn to say “teeth apart, face and jaw relaxed.”
2. **Avoid opening too wide.** This protects the joints, preventing them from locking open, and includes:
  - a. Controlling Yawns (limit how far your mouth opens during a yawn, so that you are forced to yawn against pressure)
  - b. Eating Small Bites
  - c. Avoiding general anesthesia (when possible)
  - d. Avoiding long dental appointments – take frequent rests during ALL dental appointments.
3. **Apply cold.** For severe pain, new injuries (less than 72 hours), and re-injured areas, apply cold for 5-10 minutes.
4. **Apply moist heat.** To promote healing, apply moist heat for 20 minutes for mild to moderate pain to increase circulation and muscle relaxation.
5. **Massage the jaw and temple muscles.** This action stimulates circulation, relaxes muscles and decreases soreness.
6. **Maintain good posture.** Avoid a forward head posture which may increase jaw and neck muscle activity and soreness.
7. **Hold the phone.** Do not cradle the phone; it irritates jaw and neck muscles.
8. **Sleep on your side.** Lie on your side with a pillow between your neck and shoulders and a soft support along the face and jaw, or sleep on your back with the neck curve supported.
9. **Exercise regularly.** Exercise 3-4 times/week, for 20-30 minute intervals. Choose low-impact type exercise to minimize pressure on the joints.
10. **Practice stress reduction.** Strive to reduce stress in your life.
11. **Eat well.** Good nutrition promotes joint and muscle healing.
12. **Use athletic mouth guards.** These guards may provide temporary pain relief until you are able to consult your dentist.

\*Adapted from “Tips for TMD” by Gregg Goddard, DDS, and Patricia Rudd, RPT, National Oral Health Information Clearing House, Bethesda MD.