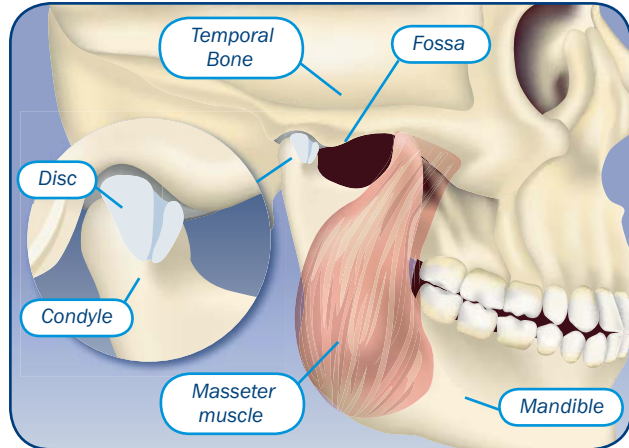


TMJ Diseases and Disorders

What are TMJ Diseases and Disorders?

TMJ diseases and disorders are a group of conditions that cause pain in and around the jaw joint (called the Temporomandibular Joint or TMJ) and nearby muscles. Jaw problems affect a person's ability to speak, eat, chew, swallow, and even breathe.



What are the Symptoms of TMJ Diseases and Disorders?

Pain is the most common symptom; however, some people have no pain but still have problems using their jaws. Symptoms can include:

- Face pain
- Pain in the jaw joint and nearby areas, including the ear
- Being unable to open the mouth comfortably
- Clicking, popping or grating sounds in the jaw joint
- Locking of the jaw when attempting to open the mouth
- Headaches
- A bite that is uncomfortable, or feels "off"
- Neck, shoulder, and back pain
- Swelling on the side of the face

Other symptoms may include: ringing in the ears, ear pain, decreased hearing, dizziness, and vision problems.

Keep in mind that occasional discomfort in the jaw joint or chewing muscles is common, and is not a cause for concern. Many people with TMJ problems get better without treatment. Often the problem goes away on its own in several weeks to months.

What Causes TMJ Diseases and Disorders?

Not all causes are known. Some possible causes are injuries to the jaw area, various forms of arthritis, some dental procedures, stretching of the jaw as occurs with inserting a breathing tube before surgery, and clenching or grinding of teeth.

How are TMJ Diseases and Disorders Treated?

Reversible Treatments

According to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research of the National Institutes of Health, TMJ treatments should be reversible whenever possible. That means that the treatment should not cause permanent changes to the jaw or teeth. Examples of reversible treatments are:

- Over-the-counter pain medications
- Prescription medications
- Gentle jaw stretching and relaxation exercises
- Stabilization splints (biteplate, nightguard)

Irreversible Treatments

According to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research of the National Institutes of Health, irreversible treatments have not been proven to work and may make the problem worse. Examples of irreversible treatments are:

- Adjustment of the bite by grinding the teeth
- Extensive dental work
- Mandibular repositioning splints
- Orthodontics
- Surgical procedures including replacement of all or parts of the jaw joint

Are Treatments for TMJ Diseases and Disorders Covered by Insurance?

Many medical and dental insurance plans do not pay for the treatment of jaw joint and muscle disorders, or only pay for some procedures. Contact your insurance company to see which treatments are covered.

Future Research

Much more research is needed. Scientists do not clearly understand what causes most TMJ problems, how to diagnosis them, how to treat them effectively, and how to prevent them from happening.

In recent years, The TMJ Association, a national patient advocacy organization, has co-sponsored three international scientific meetings with the National Institutes of Health to address these areas of concern. Details about these meetings and extensive information on TMJ diseases and disorders can be found on The TMJ Association's Web site, www.tmj.org.

