



# Temporomandibular Disorders (TMDs)

## Patient Information Leaflet



*This leaflet has been produced to provide you with information about Temporomandibular Disorders (TMDs) and aims to serve as a reminder for some points discussed in your consultation.*

*If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to speak to one of our dental team.*

## **What are TMDs?**

Temporomandibular disorders (TMDs) occur as a result of problems with the jaw, jaw joint (TMJ), and/or surrounding facial muscles. Problems may occur on one or both sides. Many people have some sign of TMDs but only a small number suffer significant pain.

## **What causes TMDs?**

TMDs can be caused by many things acting together, some of which may have little or nothing to do with your teeth. Some people have painless or painful clicking due to internal displacement of the cartilaginous disc within the joint. Some people have myofascial or muscular pain from the muscles around the joint, possibly as a result of habitual clenching and/or grinding. A few people have established degenerative changes of the joint (arthritis). Some people have a combination of one or more of these factors.

In many patients, discomfort is from overuse of the joints and muscles (essentially a “sprain”) and this can occur in a variety of ways:

- Clenching the teeth together: this may be brought on when you are concentrating or extra busy, worried, annoyed or even by cold winds.
- Habitual clenching or grinding of the teeth together: this often occurs at night but can also be during the day.
- Straining the joints and muscles by chewing pencils, biting nails, holding things in your mouth, holding the telephone between your neck and shoulder.
- Overworking the muscles by constant chewing, e.g. chewing gum etc.

## **What are the symptoms?**

- Jaw pain or soreness that may be worse either on waking or in the evening
- Jaw pain when biting, chewing or yawning
- Clicking from the joint when moving your jaw
- Stiffness or locking of the jaw joint.
- Earache without an infection
- Difficulty opening or closing your mouth
- Frequent headaches

## **How are TMDs treated?**

There are many effective and simple treatments although there is no one single cure. Studies have shown that many patients will get better with some simple measures including self-care, exercises and the use of a splint (bite guard) to reduce the tension in the muscles around the face. Less frequently patients may require alternative treatments such as medications and/or surgical intervention, but this will be discussed with you at your appointment if felt to be warranted. Even if this is the case, simple measures will have some degree of impact on your symptoms.

## Exercises

There are some simple exercises that you can carry out at home that will help to stretch, strengthen and relax the jaw muscles. This can help to manage the pain associated with TMD.

### Exercise 1:

- Close your mouth on your back teeth, resting the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth just behind your upper front teeth.
- Run the tip of your tongue backwards onto the soft palate, keeping your teeth together.
- Keeping your tongue in contact with your soft palate, slowly open your mouth until your tongue begins to pull away from the roof of your mouth, maintaining this position for
- five seconds and then allowing your mouth to close
- Relax, then repeat over a period of five minutes, twice daily

### Exercise 2:

- Stand or sit with an upright posture
- Create a double chin by drawing your chin backwards
- Hold this posture for five seconds and repeat 8-10 times

### Exercise 3:

- Keep the tongue on the roof of your mouth
- Place one index finger on your TMJ and one on your chin
- Allow your jaw to partially open, dropping down and backwards (retruding) with the help of your finger
- Do this in front of a mirror to ensure the jaw opening is straight
- Repeat this 8-10 times and then repeat the cycle with full mouth opening

### Exercise 4:

- Keep your lips gently together but allow your teeth to separate (relaxing your jaw)
- Slide your tongue backwards and forwards over the roof of your mouth in this position,
- without exerting pressure or contracting your jaw muscles
- Continue for around 3-5 minutes, twice daily

## Additional advice

Other things that may help to alleviate discomfort from TMD:

- Do not open your mouth too wide
- Whilst yawning support your lower jaw with the palm of your hand
- Do not chew chewing gum
- Avoid biting your nails
- Avoid very hard or chewy foods, e.g. steak
- Cut food up into smaller pieces so as not to open your mouth too wide whilst eating, e.g. baguettes, apples
- Use a warm compress over painful external area of the face
- Use topical non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) as your preferred pain relief e.g. topical ibuprofen 5% gel; this gives you the advantage of an anti-inflammatory medication whilst avoiding systemic side effects

**For any further information or advice, please  
call The Westbourne Centre on 0121 456 0880.**