

NEWS & NOTES

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take the bite out of jaw pain

Whether you have been diagnosed with Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction (TMJD) or simply have occasional jaw tightness and pain, massage helps tremendously.

I know this first hand, as I have lived with TMJD for years. The combination of a bite splint (from my dentist) and massage therapy have been extraordinary. It used to be that I had to “pop” my jaw open every time I opened my mouth, whether to eat, yawn or brush my teeth. No longer! This work has had such an impact on my daily life. And the relief from tension and aching has been great!

WHAT IS TMJD?

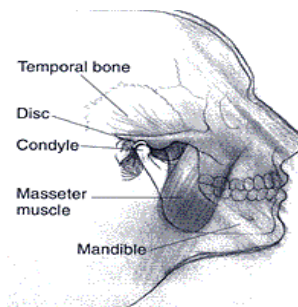
This is one of several labels for a collection of symptoms, which include pain and limited movement of the jaw. It may or may not include a clicking sound in the jaw joint. *A clicking sound alone does not TMJD make.* All of our joints click and pop sometimes. But if you have pain when chewing or yawning, if you cannot open your mouth to its full range, if you have other discomfort such as: ringing in the ears (tinnitus), headaches, neck or shoulder pain, then you should see your dentist for diagnosis and treatment. Then follow up with massage therapy.

Trauma to the jaw, stress, postural strains, tooth loss or misalignment, muscular overuse, or muscular imbalance may be to blame. Treatment should be conservative – if anyone suggests surgery (or any other

invasive treatment), please seek other opinions before taking any irreversible action.

MUSCLES AND TRIGGER POINTS

Massage helps jaw pain by reducing muscle tension and improving range of motion. Relaxing these muscles increases their circulation, encouraging healing and the elimination of cellular waste.



Massage also helps by addressing myofascial pain caused by trigger points. Myofascial trigger points are areas of heightened sensitivity that develop in chronically strained tissues. They are often quite painful, but can be released with massage therapy.

People with jaw pain often have related symptoms, such as headaches or muscle tension (causing pain or limited movement) in the neck and shoulders. Massage helps to relieve these symptoms as well. Treatment includes the muscles of the back and shoulders, head, neck and jaw.

With your permission, treating the muscles on the front of the neck and treating some jaw muscles intra-orally

provides great relief. (Working in these sensitive areas feels unsafe to some. We each have our own trauma history. Your feelings of comfort and safety are of utmost importance to me.)

POSTURE AND THE TMJ

I have only recently *fully understood* the impact of posture on jaw pain and function in my own body. After receiving very extensive postural work, my jaw position and functioning has definitely changed.

The jaw joint influences head position and, conversely, the position of the head, neck and the rest of the body influence the jaw joint. To get a sense of this for yourself, try this exercise: Sit upright and gently rub your teeth together, noticing how they fit together. Keep rubbing and noticing while you tilt your head *slightly* to one side. Feel that? Quite a difference!

After attending to your immediate concerns of pain and tension relief, it would be of benefit to consider a longer view of balancing the whole body.

STRESS AND TMJD

Stress has a huge impact on your level of muscle tension and your perception of pain. Specific to the jaw, it can cause additional clenching or grinding of the teeth. Studies have shown that massage relieves stress and reduces pain.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

There are things you can do – and stop doing – to relieve your jaw pain. It is very important that you know how much can be done to ease your pain and improve your range of motion. I want you to be empowered to take charge of your well-being!

I teach self-care techniques which include massage and stretching you can do at home. This will support the work we do, helping your muscles and nervous system to learn a new way of doing things. It is also important that you wear your bite splint. (And please stop chewing gum!)

If you think you may have TMJD, it is very important that you see your dentist for diagnosis and treatment. Massage is a powerful support (not an alternative) to the treatment your dentist can provide.

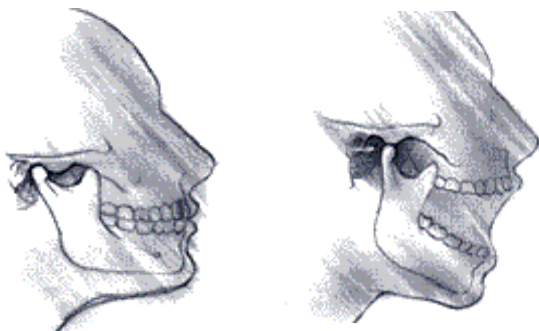
Massage and bodywork have really made a difference in my life – and in my temporomandibular joint! Try massage and bodywork for relief from your jaw, head, and neck pain, and from the other discomforts of TMJD.

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To feel your temporomandibular joint, place your fingers just in front of your ears and open your mouth.

Images are from the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, a part of the National Institutes of Health. Visit them on the web at www.nidcr.nih.gov