

Monthly Wellness Bulletin

TMJ Syndrome

CHEW ON THIS.....



Temporomandibular joint (**TMJ**) syndrome, or disorders, are primarily mechanical joint problems related to the jaw. The TMJ connects the lower jaw (mandible) to the skull (temporal bone) in front of the ear. This complex joint also includes certain facial muscles which control chewing. Problems in this area can cause head and neck pain, a jaw that is difficult to open, problems biting, and popping sounds when moving your mouth.

The TMJ (you have one on each side of your jaw) is comprised of muscles, blood vessels, nerves, and bones. The jawbone itself, controlled by the TMJ, has two movements: rotation or hinge action, which is opening and closing of the mouth; and gliding action, a movement that allows the mouth to open wider.

TMJ Syndrome can be caused by trauma, disease, wear due to aging, or habits.

Trauma: Microtrauma is internal, such as *bruxism* (grinding the teeth) and clenching (jaw tightening). Clenching is when someone continually “bites” on things while awake, often unconsciously. This could be chewing gum, a pen or pencil, or fingernails. The constant pressure of “repetitive stress” on the joint causes pain. Continual hammering on the TMJ can change the alignment of the joint, then muscle involvement causes inflammation in the surrounding soft tissue. Emotional or physical stress is implicated in this activity. Macrotrauma is physical injury to the joint, such as a punch to the jaw or impact in an accident.

Osteoarthritis: Like other joints in the body, the jaw is prone to undergo arthritic changes. These changes are caused by breakdown of the joint (degeneration), or normal aging. *Degenerative joint disease* causes a slow progressive loss of cartilage and subsequent formation of new bone at the surface of the joint. Cartilage destruction is a result of several mechanical and biological or metabolic factors rather than a single action. Its prevalence increases with repetitive trauma (micro/macro), as well as with normal aging. Immunologic and inflammatory diseases can contribute to the progression of the disease.

TMJ Syndrome Symptoms

Pain is often the first symptom of TMJ. Pain starts in the facial muscles and jaw joints, and may radiate to the neck or shoulders, or in front of the ear. You may experience muscle **spasms** from TMJ syndrome, not only in the jaw, head and neck area, but also inside of the mouth. You may feel pain when you talk, chew, or yawn. TMJ syndrome may cause **ear pain, ringing in the ears** (tinnitus), and in rare cases **hearing loss**. Sometimes people mistake TMJ pain for an ear problem, such as an ear infection, when the ear is not the problem at all. Commonly, when the joints move, you or others may hear sounds, such as **clicking, grating, and/or popping**. **Swelling** is present in many cases of TMJ. **The jaw may lock** wide open or it **may not open fully** at all. Also, upon opening, the **lower jaw may deviate** to one side. You may find yourself favoring the painful side or the other by opening your jaw awkwardly. **Your teeth may not fit properly together**, and your **bite may feel odd**. **Headaches** are also common with this disorder, and in rare cases, **dizziness** may occur.

The doctors at InMotion have a full history of success treating patients with TMJ pain. Before treatment, each case is individually assessed, including a thorough orthopedic examination of the head and neck to determine the exact cause of the TMJ dysfunction. Call today if you think you're suffering from TMJ Syndrome. We can help. **314.644.2081**

Testimonial: *For the past two years I have had a horrible pain in my jaw. I tried different pain relievers and nothing helped. Finally I visited Dr. Neff who was referred to me by my dentist. After my first visit I felt significantly better. Through different manual techniques and just a few treatments...my jaw is as it was before the pain. I feel no pain at all now and am incredibly pleased with the results. – Marta J.*