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Temporomandibular Joint Care

Temporomandibular joint dysfunction, often abbreviated as TMJ, includes a variety of specific disorders. You have been advised to give your jaw as much rest as possible. Much like any other joint that is irritated, inflamed, or having “mechanical difficulties,” your TMJ requires this essential rest to allow healing.

Normal Rest Position

1. Your lips should be closed but not tightly. You should not feel your lower lip pushing upwards to make contact with your upper lip.
2. The tip of your tongue should rest gently behind your top front teeth. The border of your tongue should be gently in contact with the roof of your mouth, right where the teeth and gums meet.
3. Your teeth should be slightly apart with your jaw very relaxed. Focus on the muscles around your face. They should not be tense from holding the teeth apart or together.
4. Maintain good posture at all times. Your breastbone should be elevated without feeling strained. Your shoulders should be resting comfortably on your trunk. Your head should be in a comfortable but erect position. Check to see if you’re hanging your head in a vulture-like posture and correct this if necessary. Your posture greatly affects the position of your jaw, so this is important.
5. Remember! Lips together, teeth apart, tongue resting gently at the roof of your mouth.

Habits

1. Do not clench or grind your teeth. You may not even realize you are doing this since they are subconscious activities. Consider using a timer to check on yourself. Set it about every 15 to 30 minutes and when it rings, check to make sure your teeth are apart. Remember, any time your teeth touch, however lightly, it is considered clenching.
2. Do not create pressure inside or around your mouth. Do not hold your tongue forcefully against any part of your mouth or teeth. Let your tongue relax.

3. Do not create a suction force inside your mouth.
4. Do not tense your jaw or facial muscles.
5. Do not bite your nails, chew on pencils, chew on ice, etc.
6. Do not bite your lower lip or the inside of your cheek.
7. Do not rest your jaw on your hand.
8. Do not play with a dental split (if you have one) with your tongue.
9. Do not protrude your lower jaw forward while talking, applying lipstick, smoking, reading, or working.
10. If you smoke, do not hold the cigarette or pipe in your mouth. Try to eliminate smoking, or at the very least, decrease the amount of smoking to allow more rest for your jaw.
11. Limit your mouth opening to avoid the painful portion of jaw movement. When you're going to yawn, curl your lips over your teeth. This will limit how much your mouth can open.
12. It is best to sleep on your back.
13. When possible, try to avoid moving your jaw in such a way that creates a clicking, popping, or grinding sound.
14. Do not chew gum- ever.
15. Reduce your caffeine intake as caffeine aggravates jaw clenching.

Biofeedback:

1. Draw a vertical line on your mirror with lipstick or similar
2. Seat yourself comfortably and align your face so the line passes through the middle of your image, from between your eyes to your nose, upper lip and chin
3. Relax by breathing in for a count of 4 and breathing out by a count of six
4. Allow your jaw to open by relaxing the muscles
5. You will see the jaw deviate toward your more affected side. Use relaxation to bring its motion back into the midline. Don't consciously open or correct the jaw motion.
6. As you exhale use the mirror as biofeedback to see your face, jaw, forehead and shoulders relax.
7. Do this for 10 minutes a day, twice a day for 10 days.