

HOME CARE FOR JAW AND NECK RELATED SYMPTOMS

Your role in the management of your jaw and neck related symptoms is of great importance. The following measures are aimed at minimizing stress on your temporomandibular joints, jaw and neck muscles. Many painful conditions of the temporomandibular joints, jaw and neck muscles tend to be aggravated by certain behaviors you do during the day and night. The goal of all of the following measures is to avoid pain, and this should be your main guide as to how strict you need to be in complying with each recommendation.

1. Eating

Avoid foods that are uncomfortable for you to chew. Eat food that you enjoy as much as possible. Your goal is to avoid or minimize pain while eating, or lingering ache after eating.

- a) Cut all foods into small, bite-sized pieces and try to avoid hurried meals
- b) Do not eat hard crusts of bread, tough meat, raw vegetables, or any other food that will require prolonged chewing
- c) Completely eliminate chewing gum, ice, biting fingers nails, chewing the inside of your cheeks, etc.

2. Jaw posture

Keep your teeth apart with lips together except when eating and swallowing. Many people unconsciously keep their teeth together, referred to as clenching or bruxism. This is a major habit to break, because it is usually done when the mind is focused on something such as driving, computer work or experiencing stress that maybe related to your occupation or family.

- a) Avoid wide opening, as in singing or routine dental care. When yawning, limit mouth opening by placing your tongue against the top of your mouth.
- b) Avoid leaning or pressing on of your jaw while working at the computer, watching TV, etc.
- c) Avoid excessive talking. Avoid holding the telephone receiver between your head and shoulder.
- d) Avoid deliberately popping your jaw

3. Neck Posture

- a) Do not sit slumped at your desk or at home. Avoid sitting on a soft couch / chair and do not fall asleep on couch or chair.
- b) Do not sleep on your stomach. Best to sleep on your back. If side sleeping, do not place hands by your face.
- e) When exercising with free weights or gym equipment, do so with good head / neck posture and with lips together and teeth apart.

4. Heat / Cold

Apply heat (dry or moist) 2-3 times a day over the large chewing muscles below and in front of your ears. Heat can also be applied to your neck. Heat should be hot, but be careful to avoid scalding. During or after the heat application, gently massage the muscles by moving the skin over them – do not press hard on the muscles.

If heat is not effective, cold may be applied using gel packs cooled in the freezer, or ice in a plastic bag. Place a thin towel between your skin and ice.