



AdvaCare Clinics: TMJ Symptom Relief with Physical Therapy

Temporomandibular joint disorder (TMJD or TMD), or TMJ syndrome, is an umbrella term covering acute or chronic inflammation of the temporomandibular joint. The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is a hinge joint connecting the mandible (jaw) to the skull and is surrounded by 68 pairs of muscles immediately in front of the ear on each side of the head. They allow you to chew, yawn, speak, and swallow and are in constant use. The abbreviation "TMJ" literally refers to the joint but is often used to refer to any disorders or symptoms of this region. This joint is one of the most frequently used in the body. The disorder and resultant dysfunction can result in significant pain and impairment.

It isn't known for certain how many people have TMJ disorders, but some estimates suggest that over 10 million Americans are affected. The condition appears to be more common in women than men.

The temporomandibular joint is susceptible to many of the conditions that affect other joints in the body, including ankylosis, arthritis, trauma, dislocations, developmental anomalies, and neoplasia.

Signs and symptoms of temporomandibular joint disorder vary in their presentation and can be very complex. On average the symptoms will involve more than one of the numerous TMJ components.

Symptoms associated with TMJ disorders may be:

- Biting or chewing difficulty or discomfort
- Clicking, popping, or grating sound when opening or closing the mouth
- Dull, aching pain in the face
- Earache (particularly in the morning)
- Headache or Migraine (particularly in the morning)
- Jaw pain or tenderness of the jaw
- Reduced ability to open or close the mouth
- Tinnitus
- Balance issues
- Vision disturbances
- Neck and shoulder pain

What Causes Temporomandibular Joint Disorder (TMJ) Disorder?

Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) symptoms can be an effect of trauma such as a car accident (whiplash for example) an injury to the joint, improper alignment of the jaw and teeth, vigorous chewing, prolonged dental work, clenching or grinding of the teeth, especially while sleeping, can also cause or aggravate symptoms. Poor posture can also be an important factor. Holding the head forward while looking at a computer all day strains the muscles of the face and neck.

Repetitive grinding of the teeth, also known as bruxism, and clenching of the jaw have been proposed to be causes of TMD. Patients who do this are often not aware of these habits unless discovered by a dentist due to abnormal wear patterns on the teeth or by a family member who hears it. Habitual gum chewing and nail biting are often causes of jaw pain due to the repetitive stress. Many dental problems associated with mal-occlusion or misalignment of their teeth can cause abnormal wear and tear to the joint. It is also very common for patients with high levels of stress and anxiety to suffer from TMD due to frequent grinding or clenching of their teeth.

A thorough examination of your posture, upper neck and shoulder girdle is imperative to proper treatment of the TMJ due to the significant influence these areas have on the joint. The upper neck is very commonly found to be involved in patients with many of these symptoms. Sometimes the upper neck is found to be the primary source of the ear, jaw or headache pain. A recent study found that 44% of patients with cervicogenic headache had TMD. This study also showed that manual therapy techniques directed at the jaw showed significantly decreased headache intensities and increased neck function after the treatment.

Because the disorder transcends the boundaries between several health-care disciplines, there are a variety of treatment approaches. Physical Therapy for TMJ may be used alone or in conjunction with other treatments.

AdvaCare Clinic has physical therapists with advanced training in the area of evaluation and treatment of temporomandibular disorders. If you or anyone you know suffers from TMJ or any type of facial or neck pain, contact AdvaCare Clinics at 952-835-6653.