

## Guidelines for Temporomandibular (TMJ) Dysfunction

**Temporomandibular Dysfunction** includes a variety of more specific disorders. The joint that is involved in these disorders is called the temporomandibular joint, often abbreviated as “**TMJ**.” The right and left **TMJ**'s provide jaw movement. You have been advised to provide you jaw with 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. Without proper rest, it is doubtful that your problems will resolve.

### NORMAL REST POSITION:

1. Your lips should be closed, but not tightly. You should not feel your lower lip pushing upwards in order 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 neither be tense from holding your 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 are hanging your head forward in a vulture-like posture and take correction action 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 clenching and/or grinding since they are subconscious activities. Consider using a timer to check on yourself. Set it every 15-30 minutes and when it rings, check to make sure your teeth are apart. Remember, anytime 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. Just 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 bit your lower lip, or the inside of your cheek.
7. Do not rest your jaw in your hand.
8. Do not play with your dental splint (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 you do to allow more rest for your jaw.
11. Limit your mouth opening to avoid the painful portion of your movement. When you are 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 it creates a clicking, popping or grinding sound.
14. **DO NOT CHEW GUM – EVER**
15. Reduce your caffeine intake as caffeine aggravates jaw clenching.

## EATING:

If you do not clench or grind your teeth, chewing food is the hardest job your jaw performs. These recommendations are designed to ease the strain on your jaw and allow it the rest it needs to bring healing.

1. Stay on a liquid (NO CHEW) blended diet until you have had no pain for two weeks.
2. After the pain has been absent for two weeks, you may begin a soft (Jell-O, mashed potatoes, boiled fish) diet.
3. **NEVER, AT ANY TIME, EAT**
  - Hard or crunchy foods such as raw carrots, nuts, etc.
  - Chewy meat, French bread, etc.
  - Thin foods such as lettuce.
  - Something which requires wide mouth opening (submarine sandwiches, hamburgers, hot dogs, whole bananas)
  - With your front teeth

## SUMMARY:

In summary, whenever you feel an increase in your pain, ask yourself:

**WHAT AM I DOING?**

**WHAT POSITION AM I IN?**

**WHAT AM I THINKING ABOUT?**

Then take corrective action:

1. Try to avoid stressful situations whenever possible.
2. Consider attending a Stress Management Class given by our Health Education Department. You will learn self-relaxation techniques that may help decrease clenching, grinding, or facial tension, even while you sleep.
3. Regular aerobic exercise may also decrease clenching and grinding.