

## Temporomandibular Joint Disorders

### What is TMJ?

Temporomandibular (TEMP-er-o-man-DIB-u-ler) joint disorder, also called "TMJ," affects the joints in front of the ears that serve as hinges for your jaw. In TMJ, one or both of these joints become swollen and painful. The problem is more common in women than in men.

### Causes

TMJ is usually caused by tight jaw muscles and grinding of the teeth. Other causes include injury to the jaw, stress, poorly fitting dentures, and arthritis. The condition is sometimes the result of a "bite" problem in which your upper and lower jaw are not lined up correctly. A family history of the disorder puts you at greater risk of developing it.

### Signs/Symptoms

You'll typically note a dull, aching pain below the ear on one side of the jaw. This pain will get worse when you yawn. Pain may move to your ear, head, or shoulder. You may hear a clicking or popping noise when you open your mouth. Your mouth may not open all the way, and your teeth may not line up when you close your mouth.

### Care

Your dentist may take x-rays of your mouth and feel the action of the joint while you open and close your mouth. You'll probably be given a prescription to relieve pain and swelling. If the problem is serious, you may need surgery.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

- You may take over-the-counter pain relievers such as aspirin or ibuprofen.
- Applying heat may help relieve pain. Use a heating pad set on low, a warm washcloth, or a hot water bottle filled with warm water. Do this for 15 minutes every 2 hours.
- Eat a well-balanced soft diet until the pain disappears. Choose foods such as gelatin, cooked cereal, baby food, ice cream, applesauce, bananas, eggs, pasta, cottage cheese, soups, and yogurt. Don't eat hard chewy foods, such as bagels.
- Your dentist may suggest a nightguard (a plastic mold that fits over the teeth) to wear while sleeping. This helps to prevent you from grinding your teeth.
- Learn methods to relax your muscles.