

Problem Solvers 15 TMJ Disorders

Synonyms: TMJ, TMD, Myofascial pain dysfunction, lock jaw, open bite, jaw pain,
Title: Temporomandibular joint pain can be debilitating

Over 10 million people suffer from some form of jaw related disorder. While this disease can have many causes and treatments it is a very complex problem with many different presentations and treatment options. This article will help to identify some of the causes for this painful condition.

The clicking and popping that occurs in someone's jaw may be a type of disorder but without further symptoms is rarely something that requires treatment. While TMJ problems affect women at a higher rate than men, it is a condition that can often cause frustration, and chronic pain.

What is the TMJ: The jaw joint, which connects the lower jaw to the skull, is your TMJ or temporomandibular joint. It is different from other joints like your knee or elbow in that it isn't simply a ball and socket joint. It rotates and then slides as its action. It is the work of this joint that lets people talk and chew, yawn and swallow.

The lower jaw has condyles that rotate in a cartilaginous biconcave, disc, which is between your skull and the jawbone. You can feel it by touching in front of your ear and opening your mouth slightly. When you open wider this disc and the jaw- bone glide along the temporal bone and allow the jaw to open even further.

When the disc is working properly and all ligaments and tendons are healthy, the jaw opens and closes smoothly without pain. When the disc wears out, the tendons stretch or detach from the cartilage or the bony articulating surfaces wear out, their can be severe pain. This can result in limited opening, popping, clicking and pain. It can also lead to a "locked open or closed bite."

What are the types of jaw problems?

- MPD or myofascial pain is when the muscles and soft tissues surrounding the jaw are inflamed, torn or in spasm.
- Internal derangement means that the jaw is dislocated, there is a displaced disc or there has been damage to the bony surfaces of the jaw joint assembly.
- Arthritis is the inflammation and degeneration disorders that can lead to chronic pain and irritation associated with arthritic changes in the jaw joint.

There are certainly combinations of these jaw problems and they can be combined with other disorders so this is a really complex problem to understand.

What causes TMJ?

Certainly trauma can play a role in the pain or dysfunction associated with TMJ

problems. The causes of temporomandibular joint pain can be multi-factorial with several causes. It could be from hormones as women have TMJ pain more often than males. There are occlusion problems where teeth or jaws don't line up properly that could cause TMJ issues. Stress and muscular imbalance has been postulated to contribute to TMJ issues. Tooth grinding called bruxism may exacerbate or inflame jaw conditions as well. Bad dental work where crowns are too high in one area or bridges hit prematurely may also cause symptoms that could contribute to temporomandibular pain and if left untreated could cause MPD or TMJ dysfunction. The fact is that there are so many symptoms and occlusal, physiological and biochemical problems that finding one cause is very difficult if not impossible.

I have fibromyalgia does this cause TMJ?

The condition of fibromyalgia is a painful condition that is poorly understood. It is a painful syndrome that causes body-wide pain of all soft tissues, muscles and tendons. This syndrome may accompany TMJ pain, chronic neck or back pain, chronic fatigue syndrome, depression, hypothyroidism, Lyme, disease and sleep disorders. This doesn't cause TMJ but may be one of the symptoms of this syndrome.

I have rheumatic arthritis and jaw pain is this common?

Rheumatic diseases are autoimmune arthritic changes that cause pain and muscle aches and pains and may cause joint stiffness and inflammatory reactions in all joints. So there may be a relationship between these conditions.

What are some symptoms of TMJ?

- Limited opening or closing of the jaw
- Pain that radiates up the jaw into the face, neck or skull
- Biting problems where teeth don't fit together properly
- Muscle pain and tenderness
- Popping, clicking, grating sounds when opening or closing the jaw that are associated with pain.

When people have noises in their joints without pain, it can be a variation of normal and is not always considered TMJ dysfunction.

I grind my teeth will I get TMJ?

Many people that grind their teeth do not have symptoms of TMJ disorder and people with TMJ problems often do not all grind their teeth.

While there are schools of thought and controversy on the link between bite related problems and TMJ dysfunction, it is not always cut and dried that this link occurs all the time. Certainly, there should be a thorough diagnosis when TMJ is diagnosed and evaluating the bite is part of this diagnostic process.

My son grinds his teeth at night will he get TMJ?

Tooth grinding for children can be related to ear infection, orthodontic eruption, stress, sleep disorders, enlarged tonsils, etc. There is no way of knowing if they will develop symptoms of TMJ later in life but there have not been articles to support that adolescent grinding progresses to adult TMJ or TMD.

How are TMJ problems diagnosed?

There are different schools of thought on the correct way to diagnose TMJ dysfunction. There are dentists that ascribe to a philosophy of neuromuscular dentistry and others that believe in centric relation position as their benchmark for what constitutes a healthy bite. There is research on both schools of thought and it is a controversial topic in dentistry.

The pain associated with joints can often be temporary and can be treated with the same common sense associated with hurting another joint such as your knee or ankle. The next article will discuss the treatments for TMJ problems.

To avoid trauma to the TMJ, custom-made mouthguards should be used for all contact sports. Using a bilaminated or trilaminated mouthguard for football, soccer, martial arts and even baseball can prevent trauma that can lead to joint problems.

Richard B. Winter D.D.S. M.A.G.D. D.I.C.O.I.
Master Academy of General Dentistry
Diplomate International Congress of Oral Implantologists
WWW.WINTERDENTAL.COM