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Overview

Your temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is located in front of your ear where your skull and lower jaw meet. It's a hinge and gliding joint, and the most frequently used joint in the body, allowing you to move your jaw for speaking, chewing, and yawning. When this joint doesn't work effectively, it is called TMJ dysfunction. You may experience a variety of symptoms, including:

- Earaches
- Headaches
- Difficulty opening your mouth
- Clicking, popping, or grating sounds in the jaw joint
- Pain when opening or closing your mouth

These symptoms can be caused by things like arthritis, injury, teeth grinding, or a displaced disk within the joint. This leaflet will guide you through exercises that can help improve TMJ function, reduce discomfort and ease pain.

Management and Treatment

The exercises we will discuss aim to prevent the clicking of the joint and strengthen the muscles that pull the jaw backwards. This helps to relax the muscles that close the mouth and reduces strain on the joint, allowing your jaw to move more smoothly like a hinge.

Home Exercise Programme

It's important to do the following exercises slowly and in a controlled manner to avoid causing further pain or discomfort:

1. **Relaxed Jaw Position:** Before starting any exercise, it is important to begin with a relaxed jaw position. Have your lips together and teeth slightly apart. Place your tongue flat on the roof of your mouth (as when you say 'N' or 'clucking'); try to breathe through your nose instead of your mouth.
2. **Tongue Placement Exercise:**
 - Close your mouth gently, ensuring your teeth touch, but do not clench. Rest the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth, just behind your upper front teeth.
 - Slide the tip of your tongue backwards towards your soft palate, as far back as you can manage, keeping your teeth lightly touching.
 - Maintaining tongue contact with the soft palate, slowly open your mouth until you feel your tongue being gently pulled away. Do not open any wider.
 - Hold this position for five seconds, then gently close your mouth and relax.
 - Repeat the entire sequence slowly and firmly for the next 5 minutes.
3. **Improving Control Exercise:**
 - Place one finger gently on your jaw joint (in front of your ear) to check that there is no clicking.
 - Place another finger on your chin and add gentle pressure towards your chin to stop your lower jaw from pushing forwards excessively.
 - Slowly open and close your mouth. Try to keep your jaw movement straight and smooth.
 - Repeat approximately ten times or as tolerated, depending upon your symptoms.
4. **Isometric Stabilising Exercise:**

- Start in the relaxed jaw position as described in point 1.
- Place your thumb under your chin. Try to open your mouth, but stop yourself using your thumb. Hold this for ten seconds and repeat until you feel fatigued. Repeat 1-3 times, with your mouth partially open.
- Place your thumb on the right side of your jaw. Try to push your jaw to the left and stop yourself with your thumb. Hold for ten seconds and repeat until you feel fatigued. Repeat this process on the opposite side.

Frequency

- In the first week, do these exercises for five minutes twice a day (for example, just before getting up and just before bed).
- After the first week, you can continue doing the exercises as often as you can throughout the day.

As you open your mouth during these exercises, you may feel some tension in the back of your neck and under your chin. The first few times, perform the exercises in front of a mirror to check that your lower teeth move straight down and don't move to one side. If done correctly, you should not hear any clicks or noises from your joints. If this happens, repeat the exercise, adjusting your position until it is click-free.

Massage In addition to the exercises, massaging the muscles around the jaw, cheek and forehead will help to relax and maintain flexibility in this area:

- Use a gentle moisturiser or oil.
- Massage the jaw, cheek area, temple region and forehead using slow, smooth, circular motions for 2-5 minutes.
- For the inside of the cheek, place your finger, thumb or spoon inside the mouth, push outwards in scooping motions, in the direction of a clock e.g. 1.00, 2.00, 3.00, 4.00, 5.00 o'clock. Repeat slowly 5-10 times for 5 seconds per motion.

Important Notes

- You may experience some initial worsening of pain or discomfort; this is because you are not used to the movements. This will subside over time.
- After 2-3 weeks, you should find that your muscles are retrained and your jaw will open and close smoothly without any clicking.
- It is important to follow these exercises as described.
- Avoid pushing your jaw too far forward.

Additional Tips

- **Posture:** Sit on a straight-backed chair. Let your back relax then sit tall, lifting your chest and use your back muscles to straighten your back, slightly arching it (not too much). Use a rolled-up towel behind your low back for support, if needed. This helps place the head back on the top of the shoulders and the jaw in a mid-position instead of forward in the joint.
- Avoid habits such as clenching your teeth, grinding, chewing gum, nail-biting, pen-chewing.
- If needed, use hot or cold compresses on the face for comfort.

TMJ Videos (Exercises & Massages)

1. **Jaw Relaxation Exercises:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wFSeYB9pN8>
2. **Jaw Movement Exercises:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWLGf34qi3g>
3. **TMJ Exercises Phase 1:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EM18snVgV_c
4. **TMJ Exercises Phase 2:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MS4O2dbCJc8>
5. **TMJ Massages:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_mHqmmUgM8