



What is the Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ):

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is a small joint located in front of the ear where the skull and lower jaw meet. It permits the lower jaw (mandible) to move and function. The joint derives its name from the 2 bones that comprise it – the mandible (lower jaw) and the temporal bone which connects it to the skull in front of the ear.

The TMJ is a ball and socket joint with a cartilaginous disc in between that allows for rotational and hinge movement of the jaw. It is also one of the most used joints of the body, and as a result is susceptible to lots of wear and tear.

What is Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction (TMJ or TMD):

TMJ dysfunction can occur for one of several reasons; the most common of these are overuse (excessive chewing of gum), trauma (car accident or blow to the jaw), misalignment of the teeth (malocclusion/improper bite - can be due to dental defect or as a result of tooth loss among others), rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis.

The TMJ problems that I deal with most often in the massage office are related to either overuse, typically from bruxism (grinding), or clenching of one's teeth, or trauma related.

The overuse of the muscles and misalignment of the teeth can cause muscle spasm and inflammation of the muscles, which will cause pain and gradually will affect muscle function, putting stress and tension on the temporomandibular joint and can gradually lead to the displacement of the articular disc if not treated.

Symptoms of Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction (TMJ or TMD):

You may experience:

1. Clicking and popping coming from your jaws combined with pain. This sound is made when the articular disc moves out of the joint capsule and then pops back into place.
2. Jaw pain when opening and closing the mouth – when chewing, talking and yawning
3. Muscle spasms and pain in the face, neck, shoulders and head
4. Facial pain and possibly pain in the ear. Since the ear is so near the jaw joint the pain can be experienced in the ear
5. Ringing in the ears and vertigo
6. Headaches
7. Anxiety

Treatment of Jaw Pain and TMJ Dysfunction

1. **Massage** – professional and self massage
 - a. **Professional Massage** – Massage is very effective at relieving jaw, neck, head and shoulder pain. Massage will deeply stretch the muscles and fascia at its attachments in all affected areas. A deep intensive massage should be followed by



lymphatic drainage massage to reduce swelling and speed-up healing. Depending on the severity of the TMJ condition massage can take anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks to resolve most of the pain. Sessions are usually done twice a week for 30 minutes each or 1hr sessions once a week, but relief is typically experienced after the 1st session.

b. **Self Treatment** -

Ice and Heat –

i. **Ice** – If the area is inflamed place ice on the jaws for up to 15 minutes to reduce swelling and pain. At least twice a day, morning and night. If there is related neck and shoulder tension do the same for those areas

Heat – Place heat on the jaws for up to 20 minutes to help loosen the jaw muscles. If there is stiffness in the neck and shoulders also, do the same.

ii. **Althernate Heat and Cold** – Alternate heat and cold over the affected areas to increase blood circulation and improve muscle tone. Start with either heat or cold and hold each for up to 3 minutes before alternating temperature. Do this at least 3 times

c. **Self Massage** –

i. Outside the Mouth – gently massage the muscles of the jaw with soft fingers slowly and carefully working each tight spot for no more than 5 seconds at a time. Work downwards from the top of the ear (temporal bone and zygomatic arch) to the lower jaw the mandible. Do this for no more than 5 minutes in total. Follow with ice application for up to 10-15 minutes.

ii. Inside the Mouth – With clean fingers slowly massage the muscles of the jaw from inside your mouth. I like working with the opposite hand inside the opposite cheek. Work downwards as noted in the previous paragraph. Slowly and gently stretching the muscles in the process, looking for trigger points (tight painful areas) in the muscles and slowly massaging them for no more than 5 seconds at a time. Do this for no more than 5 minutes in total. Follow with ice application for up to 10-15 minutes.

iii. Massage neck and shoulder muscles – When neck and shoulder muscles are tight – predominantly the scalenes and the sternocleidomastoid, subclavicular, as well as the levator scapula, subscapularis and suboccipitals and upper trapezius (search image of this anatomy on-line) – they will pull on the neck and head, pulling the jaw and head out of alignment, affecting the mobility, range of motion and correct functioning of the TMJ. Massage these muscles by using ideally a massage tool or your hand. Work deeply, but slowly for short periods of time on each painful spot you find. For more direction please come and visit Kavana Healing Arts Spa for a 1.5hr class on self massage.

2. **Rest and Stress management**

During periods of intense pain avoid using your jaws as much as possible.

- a. Eat foods that are soft to chew and that are cut into small pieces
- b. Do not chew gum



- c. Avoid yawning, if you have to yawn support your lower jaw when doing so
 - d. Don't bite your nails
 - e. Get lots of sleep

 - f. Stress Management is a very important part of TMJ management. Use meditation techniques, biofeedback, and deep breathing, as well as regular exercise.
3. **Orthotics**
See a dentist who is a TMJ specialist to build a custom splint for your jaws to help realign your bite and prevent damage from bruxism and clenching. Or go to the pharmacy and buy a night guard. They are not as good as the custom made splint made by a TMJ specialist to suit your specific needs, but they will help alleviate pain and prevent further damage.
4. **Steroidal Injections**
Steroidal Injections should be a last resort. Many times the relief is temporary and repeat injections can damage the joint. Non-invasive treatments are typically very effective.