

Advice to help with your jaw joint and jaw muscles

- Avoid biting with your front teeth (*for example do not bite into an apple; bite your nails or even hold a pen between your teeth*). These actions pull your jaw joint into an unnatural position and can make your joints and muscles ache.
- Eat soft food and chew only on the painful side using the back teeth. If both sides hurt then chew on both sides. This rests the muscles and reduces the strain on the painful joint.
- Do not open your mouth widely as this puts a strain on the jaw joint; (*for example - try to keep your teeth together when you yawn*).

You may have been told that your jaw moves in an unnatural way when you open your mouth; this can lead to pain and discomfort in the joints and in the muscles that control movement of the jaw. The exercises described below can help to re-train you to open your mouth in a more natural way and this will help reduce your pain and discomfort.

Sit comfortably in a chair in front of a mirror; your back teeth should be gently resting together

~~and you should be relaxed. Your tongue should be resting just behind your front teeth.~~

Slowly curl your tongue backwards so that you feel it running over the roof of your mouth, continue to push back your tongue as hard as you can and keep it in contact with the roof of your mouth while you slowly open your mouth. Check in the mirror that your lower jaw moves downwards in a vertical (straight down) movement and that it does not move sideways at any time during opening. Most people find that the tip of the tongue moves away from the palate during mouth opening; do not allow this to happen. Hold the open position for 5 seconds and then close your mouth and relax before repeating the exercise.

If your jaw clicks during the exercise it means that you are not doing it properly, so start again from the beginning.

At the beginning you may find that there is no improvement and the pain may seem to get worse; don't worry, this is common and should improve fairly soon. After the first week do the exercise for many short periods each day and slow but gradual improvement will follow.

Continue with the exercises until your next appointment and for a further 2-3 months after you feel better.

Some self-care suggestions to help your joint and facial pain.

- Apply heat to the joint or muscles that hurt. The application of heat for 10 -20 minutes 3-4 times a day may be beneficial. Wrap a towel around a hot water bottle or apply a moist hot towel to the area.
 - Eat soft foods and avoid hard foods such as French bread, steaks and toffee. Food should be cut into small pieces so that you don't need to open your mouth widely or move your jaw excessively during chewing.
 - Avoid chewing gum
 - Chew on your back teeth. Chewing on the front teeth puts a strain on the joints and the muscles that move your jaw. If you have no back teeth consider the possibility of having dentures to replace them; your dentist can advise you on this.
 - Avoid activities that put a strain on the jaw joints and muscles; for example: the clenching and grinding of teeth, holding your teeth together, chewing or biting of lips and the inside of your mouth, pushing your tongue against your teeth, biting finger nails, chewing pens and pencils.
 - Resting your jaw on your hands, singing and the playing of certain musical instruments may make your pain worse, so avoid these activities if this applies to you.
 - Try to be aware of the position of your jaw during the day and make a conscious effort to keep your teeth apart and your jaw muscles relaxed.
- ~ Avoid caffeine during the evening as this can disrupt sleep. Alcohol will also have an adverse effect on the quality of sleep so avoid alcohol or cut down your consumption.
- Avoid activities where you need to keep your mouth open for prolonged periods until your pain improves. If you require dental treatment you may need to postpone this or discuss with your dentist the possibility of several short treatments rather than fewer more prolonged treatments
 - The use of simple painkillers such as plain aspirin, ibuprofen or paracetamol can be beneficial; if you have pain present most of the time it may be advisable to take painkillers regularly for a number of days.
 - Pain relieving gels may help relieve pain - please ask for advice on this.
 - Drink plenty of fluids, but not caffeine containing drinks such as coffee or cola.
 - Learn and practice some relaxation techniques; many people with jaw and facial pain feel stressed, so anything that reduces stress will be of benefit.

Try not to worry too much about your jaw and facial pain; these are very common problems and often get better on their own. By following the advice on this leaflet you can speed up your recovery. There are some other simple forms of treatment that may be appropriate for you and the dentist treating you will be able to advise as to whether or not further treatment would be appropriate for you.