

Temperomandibular Joint Dysfunction (TMD)

What It Is: TMD is an umbrella term involving the TMJ and/or muscles of mastication that may cause symptoms including, but not limited to, jaw pain, jaw clicking, limited jaw motion, neck pain, and headache.

How This Occurs/Types of Dysfunction:

- TMD is typically comprised of multiple factors causing the pain/dysfunction, rather than a single condition.
 - o Internal derangement: displacement of the disc within the TMJ, causing a click when opening and closing the jaw
 - o Jaw deviations: indicative of capsular tightness and/or muscular imbalance, causing a C or S curve during opening and closing of the jaw
 - o Muscle spasm/hypertonicity: tightness or increased tone of the muscles of mastication surrounding the TMJ, causing hypomobility of the joint
 - o Lock jaw: dislocation of the disc within the TMJ, causing the jaw to be locked in the open or closed position
 - o Osteoarthritis: degeneration of the joint cartilage and underlying bone
- Studies have shown that TMD responds well to conservative treatment. Physical therapy is a common solution for the treatment of TMD.

Treatment Options: Treatment of the TMJ often consists of the utilization of several methods and techniques in order to achieve the best outcomes.

- Patient education: teaching the resting position of the TMJ and foods to avoid
- TMJ mobilizations: distraction mobilizations help to gap the joint and allow for optimizing disc position, capsular stretching, and promoting the release of synovial fluid for joint nutrition
- Stretching: exercises and positions to stretch the muscles that may be limiting the mobility of the TMJ
- Soft tissue work: a manual technique utilizing massage and trigger point release to decrease tension within the muscles of mastication
- Cervical spine mobilizations: bony and/or soft tissue restrictions in the cervical spine may affect the positioning of the TMJ
- Neuromuscular re-education: exercises to increase the strength and coordination of the muscles of mastication in order to better support the TMJ and its function
- Dry needling: a technique used to elicit a twitch response and release active trigger points within the muscles of mastication

What to Expect: It is important to understand a normal response to this treatment.

- It is typical that patients notice a steady improvement in their symptoms following each treatment. The timeline for improvement is often correlated with the type of dysfunction and chronic nature of the dysfunction.
- Soreness is likely, as muscles and joints are being stretched and strengthened. However, soreness should subside within 24-48 hours.
- If pain persists, it is important that the Physical Therapist recognize the need for referral to a Dentist or Oral Surgeon.