



Health News

from Ponte Vedra Wellness Center

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Dr. Erika Hamer, DC, DIBCN, DIBE

TMJ Disorder - It Can Even Make Talking Painful

TMJ is the acronym for temporomandibular joint, a very long name for one of the most important joints in your body. It's what allows for movement of the jaw. Your TMJ is comprised of a movable part, namely the lower jaw bone (the mandible) and an immovable part, the socket formed by the temporal bone in the cranium. It also has a little disc that helps to separate the two joint surfaces, providing a cushion. This disc also helps to guide the movement of one bony surface over the other.

Because it's involved in such important functions like chewing, talking and swallowing, the TMJ is extensively used on a daily basis. This can make it more susceptible to stress, strain and injury.

When you have pain and restriction in this area, then it's possible that you're suffering from temporomandibular joint disorder (TMJD).

The causes of pain and dysfunction in this joint may include:

- Misalignment of the teeth
- Trauma to the jaw
- Excessive teeth grinding or clenching
- Chronic postural stress

If you suffer from TMJD, you have symptoms such as pain on one side or both sides of the jaw, most commonly near the back of the jaw or close to the ear; tooth pain; headaches; or clicking and popping sounds that accompany opening or closing of the mouth. TMJ pain may also be caused by angina, sinusitis, neck pain or ear infection and inflammation.

How Do I Know If I Have a Dysfunctional TMJ?

Of course, pain can always be an indicator of dysfunction. However, because other conditions can cause jaw pain, the pain itself is not necessarily a sign that you have TMJD. If pain in or around the TMJ occurs when opening or closing the mouth, this indicates the likelihood of this disorder. Clicking or popping at the back of the jaw when eating, talking or yawning is usually a sign the little disc has become dislocated, causing improper sliding between the two joint surfaces.



Exercise of the Week

Seated Twist
Difficulty: Easy

(Consult your chiropractor before doing this or any other exercise.)

Start: Seated on a chair.

Exercise: Keeping knees pointing straight ahead, reach around behind you, holding onto armrest or backrest of chair to maintain this twisted position. Relax lower back, breathing slowly and deeply. Hold for 30-60 seconds, and then return to starting position. Switch sides, and repeat 2X per side.



An abnormally limited range of motion of the jaw can also be an early warning sign that your TMJ is not functioning properly. To test your range of motion, try the following: first, bring all the fingers of one hand together; then, bend your index finger so only the other three are left side by side; finally, open your mouth and try to fit those three fingers between the top and bottom front teeth. If normal, your mouth-opening should easily be a three-finger width.

How Can My Chiropractor Help with TMJD?

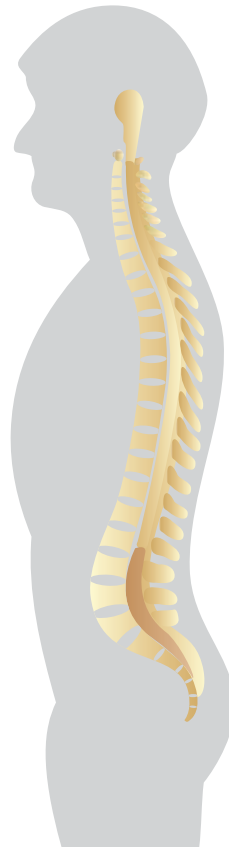
As the TMJ is a joint, your chiropractor is well qualified to help with pain and stiffness in this area. Even though they're trained to concentrate on the proper alignment and function of the spinal joints, chiropractors are educated in the physiology and anatomy of the entire body. They have the knowledge and the tools to help you.

Your chiropractor will diagnose the dysfunctional TMJ. Looking for joint restrictions, abnormal motion-patterns, and painful trigger points, your chiropractor will determine what is wrong before deciding how to fix it.

If the TMJD is due to a joint restriction or dislocated disc, your chiropractor's first option may be to apply an adjustment. Often a well-placed chiropractic adjustment can quickly solve the problem, as it resets the proper joint mechanics and reduces the pain. Other times, muscle-focused therapy provides the most relief. Powerful chewing muscles around the jaw, if tight or in spasm, will cause a high degree of compression loading in the TMJ.

Another muscle, the lateral pterygoid, attaches directly to the disc inside the joint. If this muscle gets too tight or is imbalanced with the same muscle on the other side, this can contribute to a disc malposition. A careful, precise pressure on that muscle can sometimes be just what's needed to restore normal function of the TMJ.

Being knowledgeable in a number of different treatment methods, your chiropractor is the best option when you're faced with TMJ dysfunction. If your chiropractor cannot help you, he or she may refer you to a dentist for an orthotic device (to prevent grinding of the teeth) or to a medical specialist for more testing.



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Quote of the Week

"Today, more than 95% of all chronic disease is caused by food choice, toxic food ingredients, nutritional deficiencies and lack of physical exercise."

- Mike Adams
Journalist, Educator

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