



Conservative Therapy for Popping, Clicking or Pain of the Tempormandibular Joint (TMJ)

Many people, whether or not they are wearing braces, will develop some sort of problem in and around their temporomandibular joint (jaw joint). Usually, if caught early, it is fairly simple to correct. Patients may complain about discomfort around or in front of the ear, tightness of the jaw when they wake up in the morning, a pop in one or both joints when they open, or locking of the jaw when they try to open or a combination of all of these problems.

The cause can be varying but in most cases some sort of trauma is involved. It can also be caused by stress which some people deal with by clenching or grinding their teeth during the day or while sleeping. This will cause the jaw joint to constantly jam resulting in a problem that is similar to a sprained ankle. Of course, when we sprain our ankle, we do not walk on it. If we sprain our jaw joint we usually just go right on eating the same foods and doing the same things unless the pain causes us to stop. The reason for the discomfort is usually due to inflammation in the joint which was caused by the trauma.

If we want to correct the problem we have to treat it like a sprained ankle. This means that we have to take the weight off of it (soft diet) and we need to use it as little as possible (limited range of motion). We also have to get the inflammation to go away (anti-inflammatories) and we have to make sure that it does not come back (stop whatever caused it in the first place).

In order to correct the problem we have to do the following (you cannot cheat):

1.) **Soft Diet for Six Weeks**

Please do not eat anything that requires that you chew it more than three times before swallowing it. In other words, cut your food up as small as possible so that you chew as little as possible. This does not mean that you have to eat Jello or pudding for the entire time. Just be careful about what you eat. A list of things to avoid is attached to this sheet. Please avoid them. If you chew these things it will be the equivalent of jumping on a sprained ankle.

2) **Anti-inflammatory for Ten Days**

Ibuprofen - either Advil, Motrin or Nuprin (you can even use Eckerd's)
Dosage: 600 mg (3 tablets) three times a day
Instructions: Take them with food on your stomach

3) **Limit Your Range of Motion for Six Weeks**

In other words, do not open as wide as you can to eat something, to yawn, or to yell at someone. When you do this you strain the jaw joint which adds insult to injury.



If you will follow the above instructions you should get better at the end of the six weeks. Do not stop just because things are feeling better. You need to not only get the inflammation to go away, you also have to allow the injury to heal. The problem with your jaw joint is that it does not always hurt when it is injured. This is why you have to be careful with your diet. If you cheat you will reinjure the joint and it may never heal properly or completely. This is very conservative treatment which means it is also the easiest of all the treatments. If you cheat here, it only gets tougher.

Please find below a list of things you should avoid eating.

Hard Foods

Hard Candies
Raw vegetables
Croutons
Crunchy lettuce
Any kind of ice
Hard Cookies
Hard Crackers
Hard Bread
Pizza Crust
Bagels

Chewy Foods

Bubble Gum
Caramel Candy
Taffy
Steak (unless cut up)
Chicken (unless cut up)
Pizza (unless cut up)

Large Foods

Hoagies
Sub Sandwiches
Apples (unless cut up)

Should you have any questions or concerns, please call.