



**KAISER PERMANENTE®**

## Temporomandibular Joint Syndrome (TMJ)

The temporomandibular joint is an olive-sized joint just in front of your ear that connects your jawbone to your skull and allows your jaw to move. TMJ syndrome is a set of symptoms related to wear and tear on this joint. These symptoms can include: an inability to open your mouth wide; clicking and popping noises in the joint; or pain around the joint, in the jaw muscles, or in the head, neck, shoulder, ears, or eyes.

TMJ syndrome may be caused by a number of things, though it's not always possible to determine what causes it in every case. For example, TMJ can result from an injury to the jaw, forceful stretching of the jaw during dental work, chronic tooth grinding or gum chewing, arthritis, chronic muscle tension due to stress or poor posture, or teeth that don't fit together well when you bite.

People who suffer from TMJ syndrome may feel pain in one or both jaw joints. The pain may come and go, or it may be constant.

To prevent TMJ syndrome, follow these three simple steps:

- 1.) Don't chew gum or tough foods if they make your jaw uncomfortable.
- 2.) Don't bite your nails or chew on pencils or anything else.
- 3.) Always keep your ear, shoulder, and hip in a straight line when you stand or sit.

If you already have TMJ problems, there's a lot you can do for yourself at home. Here are seven recommendations:

- 1.) When you're not eating or talking, relax your jaw muscles. Keep your teeth apart, your lips closed, and your tongue on the roof of your mouth.
- 2.) Never open your mouth wider than is comfortable for you.
- 3.) Never cradle a telephone receiver between your shoulder and jaw.
- 4.) If the pain isn't too bad, exercise your jaw a few minutes a day by opening and closing your mouth gently.
- 5.) If the pain is bad, apply an ice pack for eight minutes, three times a day. Open and close your mouth gently when the ice pack is on. Alternate the ice packs with moist heat—such as hot washcloths—applied to the jaw muscle, also three times a day.

6.) If your jaw muscle is swollen, apply the ice pack six times a day and don't alternate with heat.

7.) You can also reduce swelling and pain by taking aspirin or ibuprofen, but don't give aspirin to children or teens.

You should call your doctor or health care professional if you experience severe TMJ pain or a locking jaw, or if you develop symptoms after an injury to the jaw. You should also call if any jaw problem or pain persists longer than two weeks without improving, or if other TMJ symptoms don't improve after four weeks of home treatment. Your doctor or health care professional may give you further recommendations on how to treat TMJ syndrome. Surgery is recommended only in a very few cases.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at [www.kaiserpermanente.org/california](http://www.kaiserpermanente.org/california), then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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