



What Treatments Are Available for TMD?

Treatments for TMD range from simple self-care practices and conservative treatments to injections and surgery. Most experts agree that treatment should begin with conservative, nonsurgical therapies first, with surgery left as the last resort. Many of the treatments listed below often work best when used in combination.

Basic Treatments for TMD

- **Apply moist heat or cold packs.** Apply an ice pack to the side of your face and temple area for about 10 minutes. Do a few simple stretching exercises for your jaw (as instructed by your dentist or physical therapist). After exercising, apply a warm towel or washcloth to the side of your face for about 5 minutes. Perform this routine a few times each day.
- **Eat soft foods.** Eat soft foods such as yogurt, mashed potatoes, cottage cheese, soup, scrambled eggs, fish, cooked fruits and vegetables, beans and grains. In addition, cut foods into small pieces to decrease the amount of chewing required. Avoid hard and crunchy foods (like hard rolls, pretzels, raw carrots), chewy foods (like caramels and taffy) and thick and large foods that require your mouth to open wide to fit.
- **Take medications.** To relieve muscle pain and swelling, try nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, Aleve), which can be bought over-the-counter. Your dentist can prescribe higher doses of these or other NSAIDs or other drugs for pain such as narcotic pain relievers. Muscle relaxants, especially for people who grind or clench their teeth, can help relax tight jaw muscles. Anti-anxiety medications can help relieve stress that is sometimes thought to aggravate TMD. Antidepressants, when used in low doses, can also help reduce or control pain. Muscle relaxants, anti-anxiety drugs, and antidepressants are available by prescription only.
- **Wear a splint or night guard.** Splints and night guards are plastic mouthpieces that fit over the upper and lower teeth. They prevent the upper and lower teeth from coming together, lessening the effects of clenching or grinding the teeth. They also correct the bite by positioning the teeth in their most correct and least traumatic position. The main difference between splints and night guards is that night guards are only worn at night and splints are worn full time (24 hours a day for 7 days). Your dentist will discuss with you what type of mouth guard appliance you may need.
- **Undergo corrective dental treatments.** Replace missing teeth; use [crowns](#), [bridges](#), or [braces](#) to balance the biting surfaces of your teeth or to correct a bite problem.
- **Avoid extreme jaw movements.** Keep yawning and chewing (especially gum or ice) to a minimum and avoid extreme jaw movements such as yelling or singing.
- **Don't rest your chin on your hand** or hold the telephone between your shoulder and ear. Practice good posture to reduce neck and facial pain.
- **Keep your teeth slightly apart** as often as you can to relieve pressure on the jaw. To control clenching or grinding during the day, place your tongue between your teeth.
- **Learning relaxation techniques** to help control muscle tension in the jaw. Ask your dentist about the need for physical therapy or massage. Consider stress reduction therapy, including biofeedback.