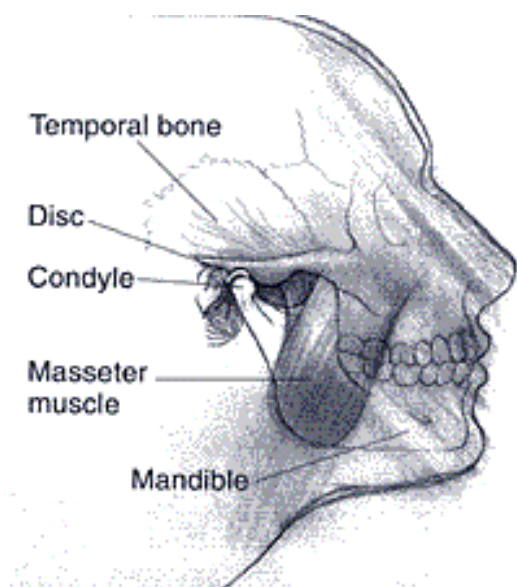


## Jaw Joint Problems



The temporomandibular joint connects the lower jaw, called the mandible, to the temporal bone at the side of the head. If you place your fingers just in front of your ears and open your mouth, you can feel the joint on each side of your head. Because these joints are flexible, the jaw can move smoothly up and down and side to side, enabling us to talk, chew and yawn. Muscles attached to and surrounding the jaw joint control its position and movement.

When we open our mouths, the rounded ends of the lower jaw, called condyles, glide along the joint socket of the temporal bone. The condyles slide back to their original position when we close our mouths. To keep this motion smooth, a soft disc lies between the condyle and the temporal bone. This disc absorbs shocks to the TMJ from chewing and other movements.

Temporomandibular Disorders fall into three categories:

1. myofascial pain, the most common form of TMD, which is discomfort or pain in the muscles that control jaw function and the neck and shoulder muscles;
2. internal derangement of the joint, meaning a dislocated jaw or displaced disc, or injury to the condyle;
3. degenerative joint disease, such as osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis in the jaw joint.

A person may have one or more of these conditions at the same time.

See [www.temporomandibular.info](http://www.temporomandibular.info) for more information.

Your problem is common in fit, healthy, young people and is **not serious**.



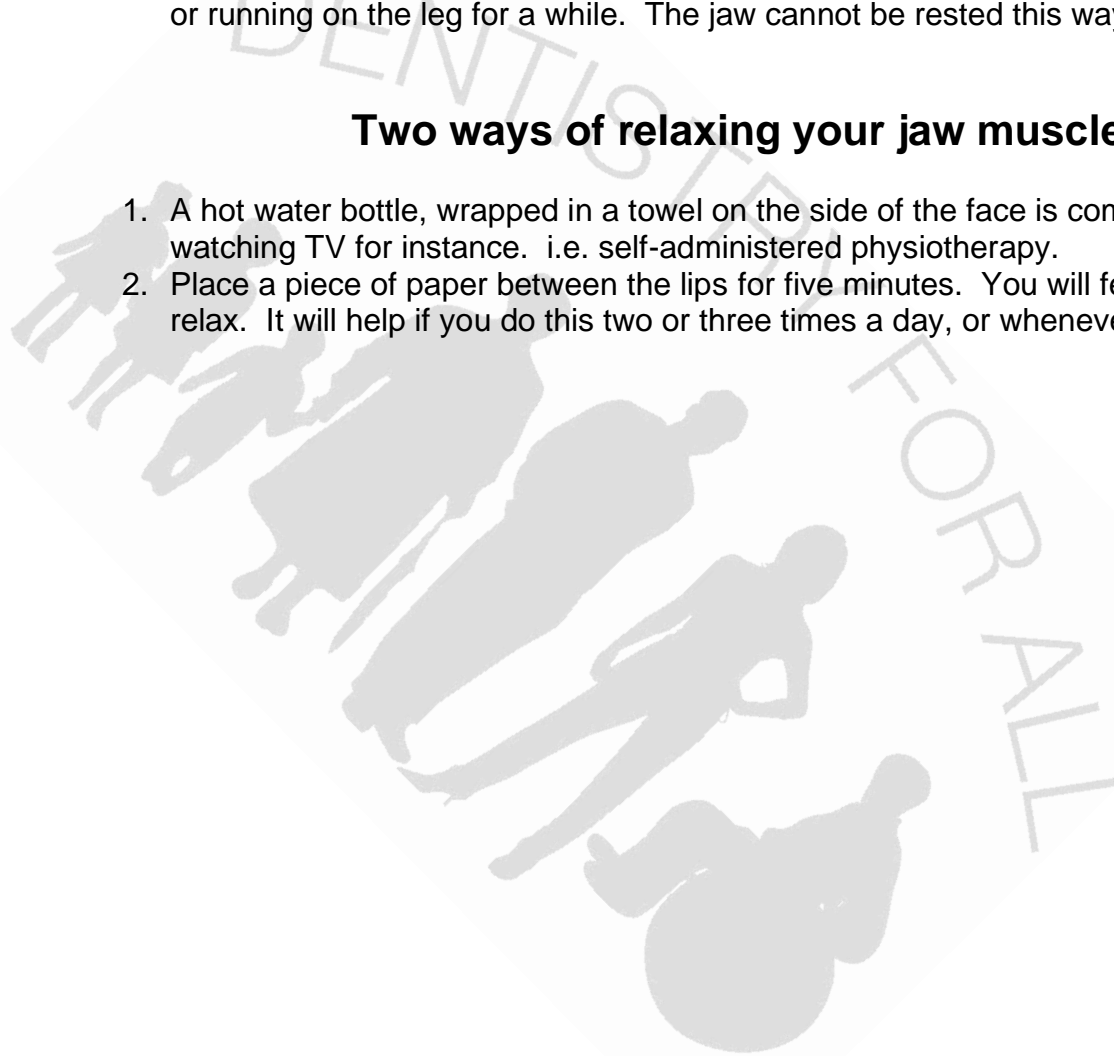
## Looking after your jaw

It is important that from now on you treat your jaw with care.

1. Eat only a soft diet whilst your joints are giving pain and take pain relievers or muscle relaxants as prescribed.
2. Don't stretch your mouth widely. Cut up apples into slices, don't chew steaks or chops, make the knife and fork, mincer or liquidizer do all the work and let the muscles of your mouth rest. Yawn with the teeth together (as though in polite but boring company).
3. Let your dentist know and avoid lengthy treatments when the jaw is giving problems.
4. Try to correct anything pointed out to you which could be the main cause of your particular problem, e.g.
  - a. Clenching your teeth;
  - b. Grinding your teeth;
  - c. Chewing only at one side;
  - d. Chewing gum;
  - e. Swinging the jaw sideways or forwards when opening.
5. Please do not expect the pain or discomfort to go immediately. The muscles and ligaments have been strained and take time to heal. Remember that if it was a sprained ankle or knee joint, you could strap it up and you would rest the muscles by not walking or running on the leg for a while. The jaw cannot be rested this way.

## Two ways of relaxing your jaw muscles

1. A hot water bottle, wrapped in a towel on the side of the face is comforting whilst watching TV for instance. i.e. self-administered physiotherapy.
2. Place a piece of paper between the lips for five minutes. You will feel the joint muscles relax. It will help if you do this two or three times a day, or whenever possible.





## 1) Exercise for Pain/Dysfunction Syndrome

Give both joints preliminary warmth with a protected hot water bottle applied to first one joint and then the other 10-15 minutes on each side before commencing exercises.

### Reflex opening exercise

Partly open mouth against hand pressure on chin for 20 – 30 seconds; swallow to relax, then open smoothly and widely without deviation, supporting both jaw joints with light finger pressure.

### Lateral opening movement

Support the left jaw joint with fingers of the left hand and place the right hand against the side of the right jaw; open with a sideways swing to the right. Do the lateral opening exercises on the opposite side.

Do each exercise in turn and repeat the whole series six times, three times a day to begin with, then reducing gradually to two a day, one a day, three times a week, etc until completely free of pain.

## 2) Exercises to Prevent Clicking of the Jaw Joint

The exercise should be carried out sitting in an erect posture in front of a mirror; it should be done at least twice daily in this position until the art of contracting the muscle beneath the chin has been completely mastered.

Clasp both hands behind the nape of the neck to provide a “headrest”. With the mouth closed and the teeth lightly touching, contract the muscle beneath the chin attempting to pull the chin back into the neck without opening the mouth. By observing the chin and neck it is possible to see the contractions of these muscles (called the suprahyoid muscles).

For the first three days do not move the jaw or the teeth when doing the exercises. Once the art of muscle contraction is learned it should be done 3-5 minutes each hour, not necessarily sitting, or in front of a mirror.

With practice a definite sensation of tension will be noted in the suprahyoid muscle and in the region of the jaw joints.

Once the essential exercise has been learned it can be done with small opening movements, learning to open the jaw with a backward pull, avoiding the “click”.

Gradually increase the extent of the mouth opening until it can be opened to the full normal extent without producing the “click”- always remember keep the suprahyoid muscle retracted.

Remember – Muscles can be coaxed, but not driven; if this exercise is practised for 2-3 weeks it will become second nature and the “click” will not return.