

Self-Care for Temporomandibular Disorders

- ***Apply moist heat or cold to tender muscle and joints.***
Heat or ice applications used up to four times per day can relax the muscles and reduce pain. For heat, microwave a wet towel for approximately one minute or until towel is warm and wrap around a hot-water bottle or heated gel pack and apply for 15-20 minutes. For cold, use ice wrapped in a thin cloth on the area until you first feel some numbness. Use what feels best, but in general, heat is used for more chronic pain conditions and cold for acute conditions.
- ***Eat a pain free diet and chew your food on both sides.***
Avoid hard foods such as French bread or bagels. Avoid chewy food such as steak or candy. Cut fruits and vegetables into small pieces. Chewing on both sides will reduce strain. If biting into food with your front teeth is painful, cut up your food and chew with your back teeth. Do not chew gum.
- ***Avoid events or activities that trigger the pain.***
Keep a pain diary to review daily activities that aggravate the pain and modify your behavior accordingly.
- ***Keep your tongue up, teeth apart and jaw muscles relaxed.***
Closely monitor your jaw position during the day (waking hours) so that you maintain your jaw in a relaxed, comfortable position. This often involves placing your tongue lightly on the palate behind your upper front teeth (find this position by saying “n”), allowing the teeth to be apart while relaxing the jaw.