

Self-Care Tips for TMD

Adapted from “Self-Care Tips for TMD” by GREGG GODDARD, D.D.S. and PATRICIA RUDD, R.P.T.

TMD patients can be more successfully treated by health care practitioners who educate patients about their disorders and involve them in their own treatment. Self-care is an essential part of the patient’s treatment. It should be designed to meet the individual patient’s treatment objectives. Self-care should be thoroughly explained to patients in language meaningful to them, and it should be reinforced at each visit. This results in better patient compliance and patient understanding. Below are 12 self-care tips that have been effective in helping patients manage their TMD problem.

1. **REST THE MUSCLES AND JOINTS.** This will allow healing. Rest includes:
 - a. **EATING SOFT FOODS:** Avoid crunchy and chewy foods like hard nuts, chips, carrots and hard breads.
 - b. **NOT CHEWING GUM**
 - c. **AVOIDING CLENCHING OR TENSING:** Learn to keep teeth apart, face and jaw relaxed.
2. **AVOID OPENING TOO WIDE.** This protects the joints, preventing them from locking open, and includes:
 - a. **CONTROLLING YAWNS** (limit how far your mouth opens during a yawn, so that you are forced to yawn against pressure)
 - b. **EATING SMALL BITES**
 - c. **AVOIDING GENERAL ANESTHESIA** (when possible)
 - d. **AVOIDING LONG DENTAL APPOINTMENTS:** Take frequent rests during ALL dental appointments.
3. **APPLY COLD.** For severe pain, new injuries (less than 72 hours), and reinjured areas, apply cold for 5-10 minutes.
4. **APPLY MOIST HEAT.** To promote healing, apply moist heat for 20 minutes for mild to moderate pain to increase circulation and muscle relaxation.
5. **MASSAGE THE JAW AND TEMPLE MUSCLES.** This action stimulates circulation, relaxes muscles and soreness.
6. **MAINTAIN GOOD POSTURE.** Avoid forward head posture which may increase jaw and neck muscle activity and soreness.
7. **HOLD THE PHONE.** Do not cradle the phone; it irritates jaw and neck muscles.
8. **SLEEP ON YOUR SIDE.** Lie on your side with a pillow between your neck and shoulders and a soft support along the face and jaw, or sleep on your back with the neck curve supported.
9. **EXERCISE REGULARLY.** Exercise 2-4 times a week, for 20 to 30 minute intervals. Choose low-impact type exercise to minimize pressure on the joints.
10. **PRACTICE STRESS REDUCTIONS.** Strive to reduce stress in your life.
11. **EAT WELL.** Good nutrition promotes joint and muscle healing.
12. **USE ATHLETIC MOUTHGUARDS.** These guards may provide temporary pain relief until you are able to consult your dentist.

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