

Conservative Management of Temporomandibular Joint Syndrome (TMJ)

ACUTE RELIEF OF PAIN:

1. Avoid straining the joint and local muscles.

- Eat a soft diet for 2 weeks. Avoid hard foods that demand forceful chewing (pretzels, steaks, apples, nuts, crusty bread, hard candy).
- Stop all other stresses on the joint, like nail biting and gum chewing.

2. Decrease the inflammation in the joint.

- Use anti-inflammatory drugs (Motrin, Advil, Aleve, not plain Tylenol). Check with your doctor if there are any contraindications for you taking those medications.

3. Apply warm compresses over the joint for 10 minutes, at least 3 times a day.

Alternatively, you may try an ice pack, if you are having acute pain.

4. Massage the muscles of mastication (temple area, cheekbone area, and neck) at least 3 times a day.

5. Have a mouth guard fitted to stop nighttime tooth grinding.

You can try to fit one on your own with the smallest and most inexpensive moldable ones from a sports store. Do not use one of the large, fancy ones since they are too big for this and may make your symptoms worse.

Do all the above intensely for the first week, then taper off and try to return to a regular diet and discontinue medication slowly over a week or two.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Consider seeing your dentist.

Cavities and other problems can alter the way your teeth come together, and this can put undue stress on your TMJ.

If the "homemade" mouth guard does not work, you may need to see your dentist to have a customized one made for you.

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