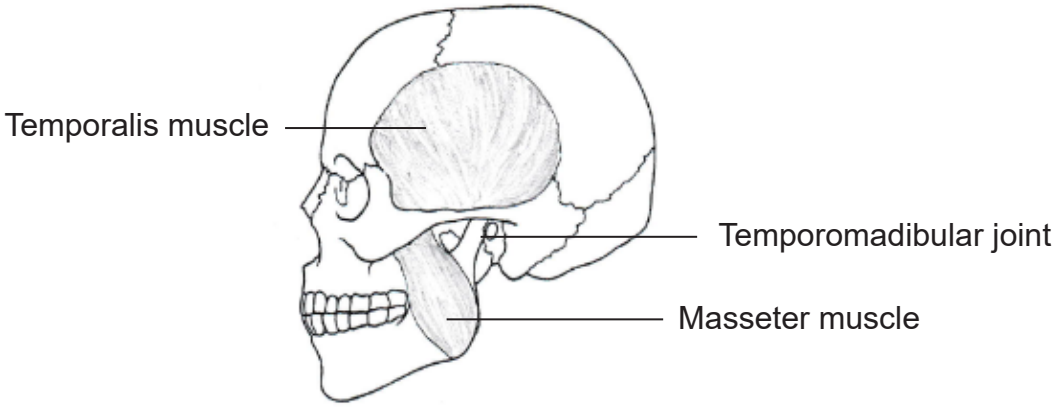
Jaw Joint Problems



The temporomandibular joint (jaw joint) is located in front of the ear where the skull and the lower jaw meet. The joint allows the lower jaw (mandible) to move during chewing and speaking. This joint itself is made up of two bones that are separated by a disc of cartilage. Ligaments and muscles support and control the movements of the jaw.

Problems with the jaw are very common but typically only last a few months before getting better.

Approximately 30% of people have jaw joint pain, more commonly in women than men.

The common symptoms are:

- Joint noise – such as clicking, cracking, crunching, grating or popping.
- Pain – usually a dull ache in and around the ear. The pain may radiate in to the cheek, cheekbone, downwards into the neck or up into the head.
- Headache
- Earache
- Limited mouth opening
- Jaw locking.

What causes jaw joint problems?

Jaw joint pain is often due to multiple reasons – the muscles, the joint, the disc, with lots of external factors impacting upon pain. Pain is most often caused by the muscles around the jaw joint tightening up, over working or going into spasm. Consequently, joint noise can occur due to added tension and pressure from the muscles. Furthermore, disc movement can create joint noises. The noise can sound particularly loud to some patients because the joint is just in front of the ear. Muscle tension and joint stiffness can limit mouth opening.

Factors such as stress, bad habits, facial trauma and oral procedures can cause pain. Poor habits such as poor posture, clenching, grinding, biting nails and resting your chin on your hand can cause jaw joint pain.

compassionate care

Why have I got jaw joint problems?

Problems may start due to habits such as grinding or clenching the teeth when under stress or at night. Nail biting or holding things between the teeth can also cause jaw joint problems. Less commonly missing back teeth, an uneven bite or an injury to the jaw can lead to the problem. Often no obvious cause is found.

Are my problems anything to worry about?

Jaw joint problems are usually not serious and do not lead onto other problems eg arthritis of the jaw joint. They are however a nuisance. Fortunately jaw joint problems usually respond to simple treatments.

How can I help myself and what are the treatments?

Treatments vary depending on the primary problem. On the whole, treatment is aimed at trying to reduce the stress and workload of the muscles so allowing the disc of cartilage to return to a normal position in the joint.

- **Learn the resting position of the jaw** – Have the lips together and the teeth slightly apart. Place the tongue as flat as you can on the roof of the mouth as when you say the letter "N" or like "clucking". Try to breathe through the nose rather than the mouth. Do this regularly to relax the jaw. You could set an alarm, or use an app designed to regularly remind you to improve the jaw position.
- **Good posture** reduces the stresses on the jaw and reduces muscle activity in the neck and face. Try sitting and standing tall, as though a helium balance is drawing you upwards, drop your chin slightly, and lengthen through your collar bones.
- **A soft diet** – This allows over-worked muscles to rest. Avoid foods such as crusty bread, raw vegetables, steak and toffees. Cut food into smaller pieces.
- **Chew evenly** using both sides of the mouth to prevent muscle imbalance. Avoid caffeine, it is a stimulant and can increase muscle activity.
- **Painkillers** – Pease seek the advice of a Pharmacist/GP regarding the use of simple pain relief medication. This will help to reduce pain and allow you to keep active.
- **Heat/ice** –The use of heat can help with pain and muscle relaxation. Use a hot water bottle, or microwavable wheat bag, following the instructions provided when you purchased it. To protect your skin from heat burns, wrap the item in a few layers of towel. Leave in place for 15-20 minutes. It can be reapplied after 2 hours if you wish.
  The use of ice can help with pain and inflammation. Use crushed ice cubes or a bag of frozen peas. To reduce the risk of developing an ice burn place the ice pack in a wet towel. Leave in place for 15-20 minutes. It can be reapplied after 2 hours if you wish. It is normal for the skin to become pink with either heat or ice packs, however, if you experience discomfort or burning sensation remove the item immediately. Do not apply heat or ice packs if you have poor skin sensation or poor circulation, if you are diabetic or over areas of infection.
- **Massage** – Use a gentle circular motion with your fingers over tender muscles to relieve pain and tension.
- **Identifying, monitoring and avoiding poor habits** such as clenching or grinding. Avoid resting your jaw on your hand. Avoid wide yawning by supporting the jaw with your hand. During dental work ask for regular breaks to rest the joint. Avoid sleeping on the stomach as this puts abnormal forces on your jaw as well as the neck. Avoid caffeine as this can increase jaw tension leading to pain and headaches.
- **A clear plastic splint / bite appliance** may be provided that fits over the teeth and is worn mainly at night.
- **Physiotherapy** can offer advice on exercises to reduce stress, improve flexibility and strength of the muscles. Other treatments to improve pain, tenderness, movement and muscle control. Regular daily exercise is beneficial to your general health and mental health.
- **Dental check up/ replace missing teeth** to balance the bite – if this is appropriate it will have been discussed with you.

What happens if these methods do not produce an improvement?

Surgery is only carried out in a very small number of cases, a referral to a specialist may be advised by your GP, dentist or physiotherapists.

Useful contact

Maxillofacial Unit, Huddersfield Royal Infirmary
8.30am – 5.00pm
Reception 01484 355485, Secretary 01484 342548, Unit Manager 01484 342336

Physiotherapy, Huddersfield Royal Infirmary
Reception 01484 342434

Further information can be found at **www.baos.org.uk**

Web Address: http://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/physiotherapy-outpatients/patient-careinformation/

Scan the QR code below to take you to our website.

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Physiotherapy Department
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary
Telephone: 01484 342434

MSK Physiotherapy Admin Office
Telephone: 01484 905380

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obrat'te se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور فارمیٹ یا زبان میں درکار ہوں، تو
براۓ مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

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