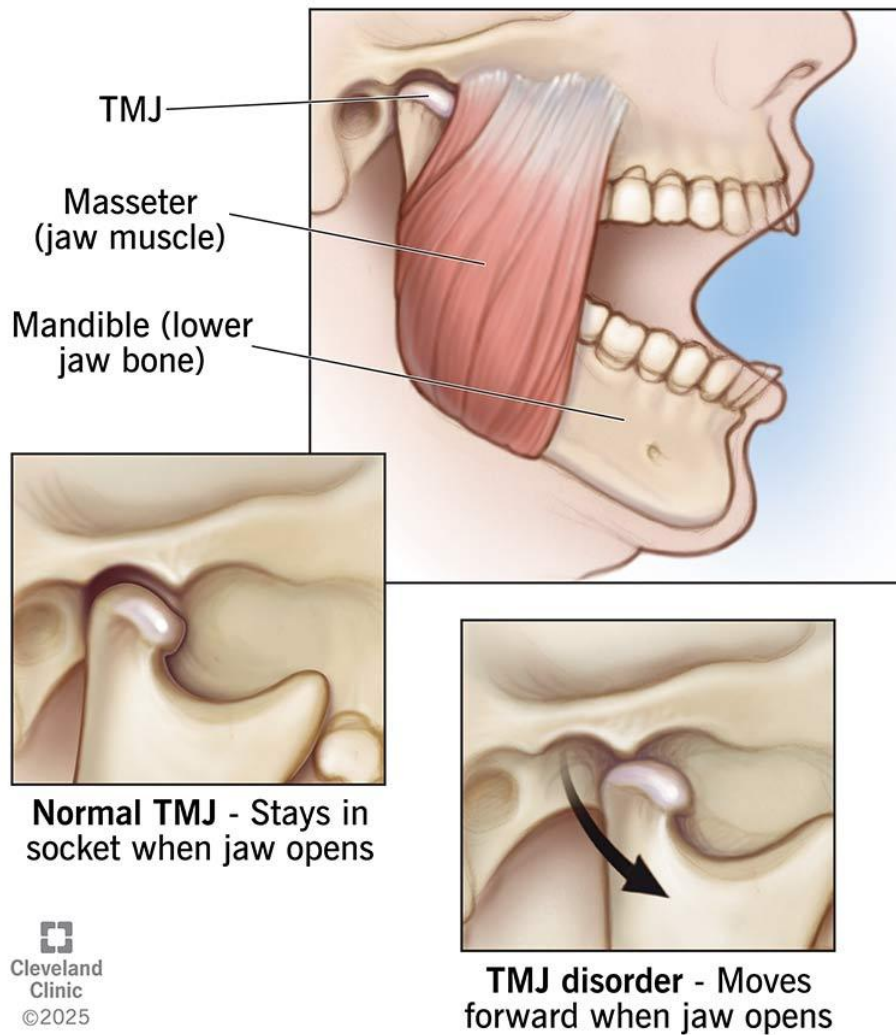


Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Dysfunction

TMJ disorder

Temporomandibular joint dysfunction



What is TMJ Dysfunction?

Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction (often called **TMJ disorder** or **TMD**) refers to pain or problems affecting the jaw joint and surrounding muscles.

The TMJ connects your lower jaw (mandible) to your skull and allows you to talk, chew, yawn, and open/close your mouth.

TMD is quite common and usually improves with simple self-care and exercises.

Common Symptoms

People with TMJ dysfunction may experience:

- Jaw pain or tenderness (near the ears or cheeks)
- Clicking, popping, or grinding noises from the jaw
- Difficulty opening the mouth fully
- Jaw locking (open or closed)
- Headaches
- Earache or a feeling of fullness in the ear
- Pain when chewing hard foods
- Muscle tension in the face, neck, or shoulders

Symptoms may come and go and often relate to stress or habits.

Causes

TMD can be caused by multiple factors, including:

- Jaw muscle tension (often related to stress)
- Teeth grinding or clenching (bruxism)
- Poor posture (e.g., slouched sitting, tech-neck)
- Previous jaw injury
- Arthritis in the jaw joint
- Dental alignment issues
- Habitual chewing of gums/hard foods
- Nail biting or chewing on pens

Often, no single cause is found.

When Should I Seek Urgent Help?

Urgent review is recommended if you experience:

- Sudden, severe jaw pain after injury
- Inability to close or open your mouth at all (true jaw dislocation)
- New weakness or numbness in the face
- Jaw swelling with fever
- Unexplained weight loss with persistent jaw pain

These situations are uncommon.

Diagnosis

Most cases are diagnosed clinically by your GP, dentist, or musculoskeletal clinician based on:

- Symptoms
- Jaw movement examination
- Muscle tenderness assessment

Scans (X-ray, MRI, or CT) are rarely needed unless symptoms are severe or unusual.

Treatment and Management

1. Heat or Cold Therapy

- **Heat** helps relax tight jaw muscles (warm compress for 10–15 minutes).
 - **Cold packs** can reduce inflammation if the jaw feels swollen or acutely painful.
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2. Jaw Rest and Habit Changes

Avoid activities that strain the jaw, such as:

- Chewing gum
- Hard or chewy foods (nuts, toffees, crusty bread)

- Wide mouth opening (e.g., big yawns — support the jaw gently)
- Nail biting or chewing on objects

Try to keep your teeth slightly apart (lips together, teeth apart).

3. Stress Management

Stress often leads to jaw tension or clenching. Helpful approaches include:

- Breathing exercises
 - Mindfulness or relaxation apps
 - Stretching the neck and shoulders
 - Regular physical activity
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4. Medication

For short-term relief:

- **Paracetamol**
 - **NSAIDs** such as ibuprofen
 - Muscle relaxants may be prescribed in some cases
- Always follow your GP/pharmacist's advice.
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5. Physiotherapy or Specialist Exercises

Jaw exercises help improve movement, strengthen muscles, and reduce pain.

Common exercises include:

- **Controlled mouth opening**
- **Resisted opening/closing**
- **Tongue-up exercise**
- **Side-to-side jaw glides**
- **Posture correction exercises**

A physio or dentist experienced in TMD can guide you.

6. Dental Approaches

If teeth grinding/clenching is suspected:

- A **nightguard/splint** may be recommended by a dentist
This helps reduce pressure on the jaw joint.
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7. Posture Advice

Poor upper-body posture can strain jaw muscles.

- Keep screens at eye level
 - Avoid long periods of hunched sitting
 - Strengthen upper-back and neck muscles
 - Reduce “tech-neck” by lifting your phone/device
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8. Injections or Advanced Treatments

If symptoms do not improve after 3 months, a specialist may consider:

- Trigger point injections
- Steroid injections
- Botox (for severe jaw clenching)
- Specialist dental or maxillofacial referral

Most people will not need these treatments.

(TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT DYSFUNCTION)



**ISOMETRIC
OPENING**



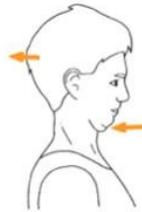
**TONGUE
CLICKS**



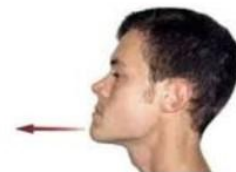
**ISOMETRIC
DEVIATION**



**MASSETER
RELEASE**



**CHIN
RETRACTIONS**



**JAW
PROTRACTION**

Self-Care Tips

- Eat softer foods during flare-ups
- Apply heat daily
- Practice jaw relaxation (“lips together, teeth apart”)
- Perform regular jaw and neck exercises
- Reduce habits like clenching or gum chewing

Prognosis

Most cases of TMJ dysfunction improve within **6–12 weeks** with self-care and exercises. Some people experience occasional flare-ups, which are usually manageable with the strategies above.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does TMJ dysfunction mean arthritis?

Not always. Some people have joint wear changes, but many cases are muscle-related.

Is clicking dangerous?

No. Clicking without pain is usually harmless.

Will I need surgery?

Very rarely. Surgery is only considered for severe structural problems.

Where to Get More Help

- **GP or MSK clinician**
- **Physiotherapist**
- **Dentist** (especially for clenching/grinding)
- **Maxillofacial specialist** if symptoms persist or are severe