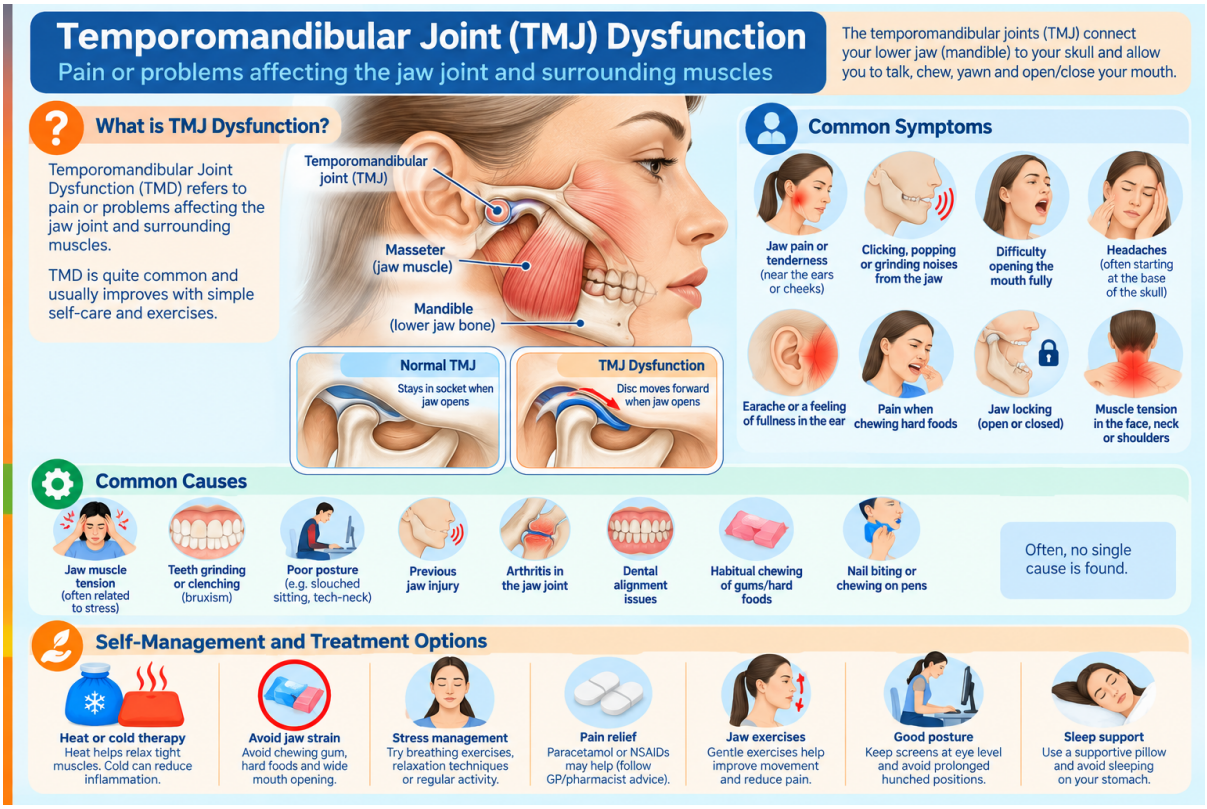
PATIENT INFORMATION / JAW HEALTH

Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Dysfunction

Understanding jaw symptoms and taking steps towards recovery.



What is TMJ dysfunction?

Temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMD) describes pain or problems involving the jaw joint and nearby muscles. The joint helps you talk, chew, yawn and open or close your mouth.

The key message

TMD is common and often improves with simple self-care, habit changes and gentle exercises.

Symptoms and possible causes

Common symptoms

- Pain or tenderness near the ears, cheeks or jaw
- Clicking, popping or grinding sounds
- Difficulty opening the mouth fully or jaw locking
- Headache, earache or a feeling of fullness in the ear
- Pain when chewing hard foods
- Tension in the face, neck or shoulders

What can contribute to TMD?

Jaw clenching or teeth grinding, stress-related muscle tension, previous jaw injury, arthritis, posture, hard-food chewing, gum chewing and habits such as nail biting. Often there is no single cause.

How is it diagnosed?

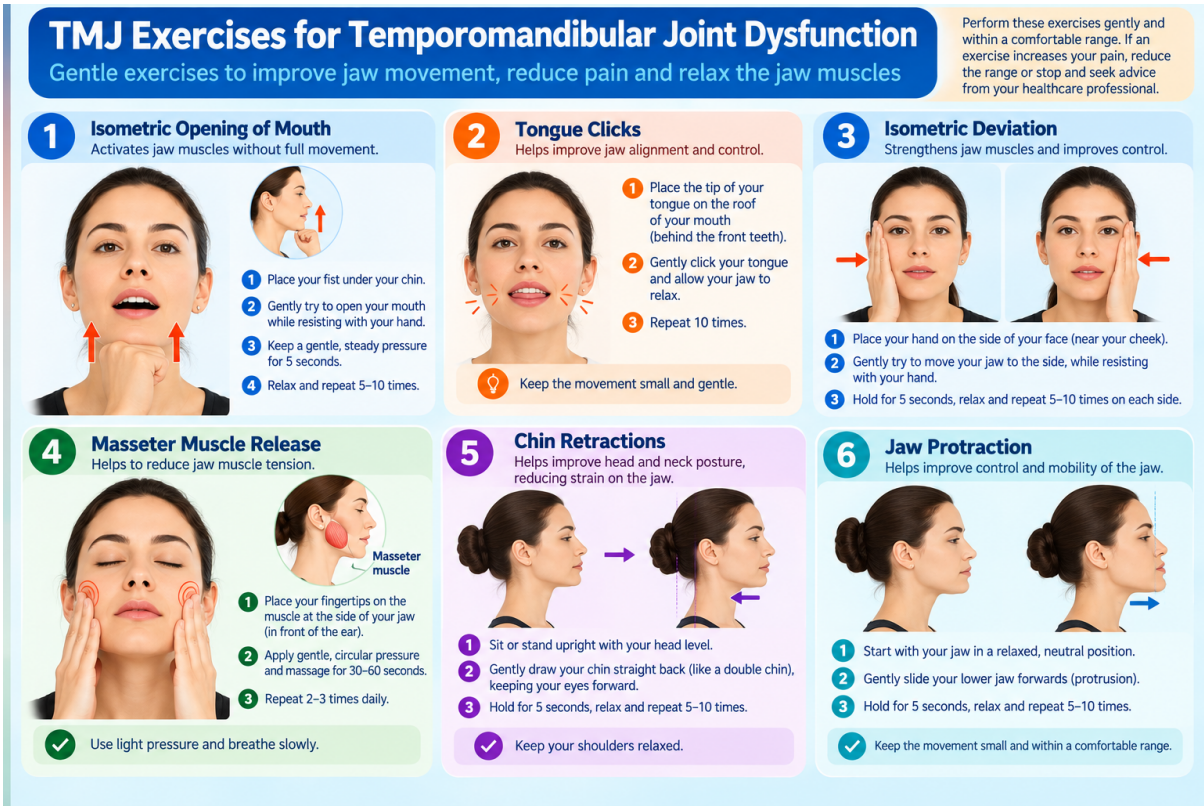
A GP, dentist or musculoskeletal clinician usually assesses your symptoms, jaw movement and muscle tenderness. X-rays or other scans are not usually needed unless symptoms are severe or unusual.

Jaw clicking

Clicking without pain is usually harmless. Speak to a clinician if clicking is associated with persistent pain, locking or difficulty opening your mouth.

Gentle TMJ exercises

These illustrated exercises may help jaw movement and muscle control. Your physiotherapist or dentist can advise which are appropriate for you.



Exercise safely

Move gently within a comfortable range. Do not force the jaw, and stop or reduce an exercise if symptoms worsen. Seek personalised guidance if your jaw locks or movement is significantly restricted.

Everyday habits matter

- Keep your lips together and teeth apart when resting.
- Temporarily choose softer foods and avoid gum chewing or wide yawns.
- Take breaks from prolonged screen use and relax your jaw and shoulders.

When to seek help

Seek urgent medical advice

Get urgent assessment for severe jaw pain after injury, a jaw stuck open or closed, new facial weakness or numbness, swelling with fever, or unexplained weight loss with persistent jaw pain.

What to expect

Many cases improve over around 6–12 weeks with self-care and exercises, although recovery varies. Occasional flare-ups may occur. If symptoms persist or are severe, your clinician may discuss specialist dental or maxillofacial assessment. Surgery is rarely required.

Who can help?

- Your GP or musculoskeletal clinician
- A physiotherapist experienced in jaw problems
- Your dentist, particularly for teeth grinding or clenching
- A maxillofacial specialist for persistent or severe problems

B-Well Physiotherapy Services

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This leaflet provides general information and does not replace individual medical or dental advice.