



# Low Country ENT

EAR, NOSE & THROAT • HEAD & NECK SURGERY  
HEARING AIDS • BALANCE TESTING

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## **Temporomandibular Joint Disorder (TMJ)**

TMJ disorders occur as a result of problems with the jaw joint. The temporomandibular joint is a ball-in-socket type of joint that connects the lower jaw (mandible) to the temporal bone of the skull, located immediately in front of the ear. This joint allows you to move your jaw open and close and back and forth when you chew, talk, or yawn.

### **Causes of TMJ**

Not always clear, but may involve:

- Grinding or clenching your teeth.
- Excessive chewing, such as gum chewing.
- Dislocation of the soft cushion or disc between the ball and socket of the joint.
- Presence of osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis in the TMJ.
- Stress, which can cause a person to tighten facial and jaw muscles or clench the teeth.

### **Symptoms of TMJ**

- Pain or tenderness in the face, jaw joint area, neck and shoulders, and the ear.
- Limited ability to open the mouth very wide.
- Jaws that get "stuck" or "lock" in the open or closed-mouth position.
- Clicking, popping, or grating sounds in the jaw joint when opening or closing the mouth.
- Difficulty chewing or a sudden uncomfortable bite – as if the upper and lower teeth are not fitting together properly.

### **Conservative Treatment and Prevention of TMJ**

- Apply a warm compress to joint area for 5 minutes, this may be repeated throughout the day.
- Eat soft foods such as yogurt, mashed potatoes, cottage cheese, soup, scrambled eggs, fish, cooked fruits and vegetables, beans, and grains. In addition, cut foods into small pieces to decrease the amount of chewing required.
- Take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, Aleve) to relieve joint inflammation on a scheduled basis for two weeks.
- Wear a mouth guard. They prevent the upper and lower teeth from coming together, lessening clenching or grinding. Your dentist can fit you with a mouth guard.
- Learning relaxation techniques to help control muscle tension in the jaw.
- If conservative measures do not help, discuss further evaluation and treatment with your dentist or oral surgeon