

NORTH COUNTY EAR, NOSE AND THROAT –
HEAD AND NECK SURGERY
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TMJ Dysfunction
(temporomandibular joint dysfunction)

What is TMJ dysfunction?

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) hinges the lower jaw, or mandible, to the temporal bone of the skull. This joint is in motion any time a person eats, drinks, or talks. TMJ dysfunction occurs when the jaw joint or the surrounding muscles do not work smoothly. Any one or more of the following can contribute to dysfunction:

- arthritis (inflammation)
- trauma (especially grinding or clenching the teeth)
- ill-fitting dentures
- recent dental work
- intermittent joint dislocation

TMJ dysfunction is especially common in women age 20-50. Dysfunction of the joint and/or the surrounding jaw and face muscles may be so severe as to cause a **"Myofacial Pain Syndrome."**

Possible Symptoms

- ear pain!! (often radiating to the upper neck)
- ringing in the ears -headache -chronic facial or upper neck pain
- pain with chewing -clicking -popping

Isolated ear pain is the only symptom in many patients with TMJ dysfunction.

How is TMJ dysfunction treated?

Controlling inflammation

- soft diet - this is the most important treatment
 - no food harder than scrambled eggs for 4-6 weeks
 - cut food into very small pieces
 - absolutely no gum chewing!
- warm compresses -at least twice a day
- anti-inflammatory (e.g. Aleve, ibuprofen/Motrin, Naproxen)
 - may* be recommended if no other medical contraindications exist (such as gastritis, stomach ulcers, or diabetes)
- muscle relaxant (e.g. Flexeril)
 - may* be prescribed

A severe, acute episode may require 2-3 weeks to be controlled.

Addressing any reversible cause

See your dentist. Say that your otolaryngologist suspects TMJ dysfunction as the cause of your symptoms. Dentists and oral-maxillofacial surgeons are the best equipped to further investigate reversible causes and other potential treatments. A "night guard" may be given.