

# Home Care Recommendations

## Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction (TMD)

Your role in the management of your jaw and neck related symptoms is of great importance. The following measures are aimed at minimizing stress on your temporomandibular joints, jaw, and neck muscles. Many painful conditions of the temporomandibular joints, jaw, and neck muscles tend to be aggravated by certain behaviors you do during the day and night. The goal of all of the following measures is to minimize and/or alleviate pain.

### 1. Eating

Avoid foods that are difficult to chew.

- a) Cut food into small, bite-sized pieces and try to avoid hurried meals.
- b) Do not eat hard crusts of bread, tough meat, raw vegetables, or any other food that will require prolonged chewing.
- c) Completely eliminate chewing gum, ice, and/or hard candy, biting finger nails, chewing the inside of your cheeks, etc.

### 2. Jaw Posture

Keep your teeth apart with lips together, except when eating and swallowing. Many people subconsciously keep their teeth together, referred to as clenching or bruxing (extended nighttime grinding). This habit generally occurs when the mind is focused on something such as driving, computer work or experiencing stress.

- a) Avoid opening wide, as in singing or during routine dental care. When yawning, limit mouth opening by placing your tongue against the top of your mouth.
- b) Avoid leaning or pressing on your jaw while working at the computer and watching T.V., excessive talking, and holding the telephone receiver between your head and shoulder.
- c) Avoid deliberately popping your jaw.

### 3. Neck Posture

- a) Do not sit slumped at your desk or at home. Maintain good head posture (ears lined up with shoulders). Avoid sitting on a soft couch/chair and do not fall asleep on a couch or chair.
- b) Do not sleep on your stomach. It is best to sleep on your back. If side sleeping, do not place hands by your face.
- c) When exercising with free weights or gym equipment, do so with good head/neck posture and with lips together and teeth apart.

#### **4. Heat/Cold**

Apply heat (dry or moist) 2-3 times a day over the large chewing muscles below and in front of your ears. Heat can also be applied to your neck. Heat should be hot but be careful to avoid scalding. During or after heat application, gently massage the muscles by moving the skin over them – do not press hard on the muscles.

If heat is ineffective, cold may be applied using gel packs from the freezer or ice in a plastic bag. Place a thin towel between your skin and the ice.