



TMJ/TMD Self Care & Stretches

- **Disengagement & Posture:**

- One of the most important but difficult steps in breaking the habit of clenching and grinding your teeth while awake is to re-train yourself to keep the lips together and the teeth apart. Saying the letter, "N" can help place your lips tongue and teeth in a more relaxed position. Repeat to yourself, *"Lips together, teeth apart & tongue to the roof of the mouth."*
- Set a timer on your phone, computer or using an app, such as No Clenching. Start with every hour and adjust up or down as needed. Use the timer to remind you to check yourself for if your teeth are touching. Go through the following steps (the order is not important): Sit up straight, with your neck in a neutral position, teeth apart, tongue to the roof of your mouth, then squeeze your shoulder blades gently together 3-5 times and hold for 3-5 seconds and take 2 deep breaths in and out through your nose.
- These simple steps will relax the muscles that are tense and taut, thus permitting a more natural positioning of the jaw joints.

- **Moist Heat or Ice:**

- Moist heat applied to the area around a painful joint provides more relief from pain than dry heat.
- Fill a bowl with water as hot as your skin can stand. Soak 2 large wash cloths in the water. Take one out, wring it out and apply it to the painful area. When the first towel cools, apply the second towel.
- You can also place the moist, hot towel to the painful area and then apply a heating pad over it to help maintain the heat.
- This procedure should be carried out for 20 minutes, 3 times a day. Allow at least a 20 minute interval between applications. Alternatively, the same process can be done instead with ice. Either is ok, so it is a matter of personal preference.

- **Stretching:**

- For some people, the stretching can make more of a difference than anything else. The stretches can be more comfortably done after using moist heat. You may find that how much and how often you need to stretch to stay comfortable may vary over time.
- Stretch for 3-5 seconds, 3-5 times, 3-5 times throughout the day. Place your index fingers on your lower front teeth & your thumbs on your upper front teeth and slowly but firmly push straight down, rotating your wrist to extend the stretch.

- **Soft Diet:**
 - During the initial phase of treatment, particularly if symptoms are acute, stay on a definite soft diet (soup, smoothies, eggs, yogurt, hamburger, etc.)
 - When the symptoms start to improve, you may start to eat more substantial foods. You should cut all foods into bite size pieces and **DO NOT** open your mouth any wider than the thickness of your thumb.
 - **DO NOT** eat any hard crusts of bread, tough meat, raw vegetables, chew gum, or any other food that requires prolonged chewing or maximum jaw opening.
- **Medications:**
 - To help reduce the pain and the inflammation of the joint and/or muscles, Ibuprofen or Naproxen may be taken. Follow the dosage instructions on the label.
 - For Ibuprofen, you should take 2 tablets (400mg) every 4-6 hours, as needed.
 - For Naproxen, you should take 2 tablets to start then 1 tablet every 6-12 hours (up to 3 per day), as needed.
 - Note - Ibuprofen is also sold under the brand names Advil & Motrin. Naproxen is also sold under the brand name Aleve.
 - Do not take Ibuprofen or Naproxen if you are allergic to them or any other NSAID type medication. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) may be used instead to help reduce the pain. 1-2 tablets of Acetaminophen every 4 hours may be taken, as needed.

REMEMBER: THE ONLY TIME YOUR TEETH SHOULD TOUCH IS DURING SWALLOWING AND CHEWING.