

WHAT IS THE TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT?

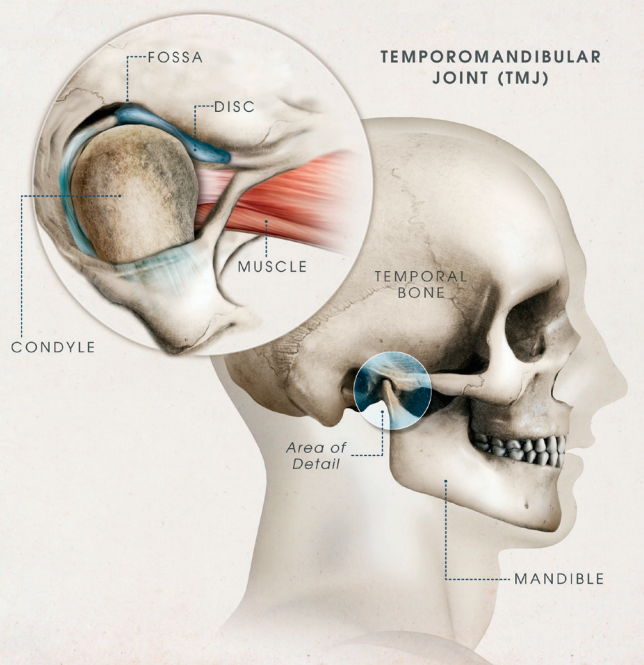


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If you place your fingers in front of your ears and open your mouth, you can feel the joints. The temporomandibular joint connects the condyle of the lower jaw (mandible) with a socket (fossa) of the temporal bone on the side of the head.

These joints allow the jaw to smoothly move up and down and side to side, allowing us to talk, chew, and yawn. Muscles attached to the jaw joint control its position and movement.

A soft disc lies between the mandibular condyle and the temporal bone and absorbs shock to the jaw joint.

Prosthodontists are dentists who have completed three additional years of postgraduate training beyond dental school. In addition to helping patients with pains in the jaw, they use the latest techniques, including advanced digital technology, to create personalized treatment plans and deliver efficient, long-lasting dental care.

Prosthodontists specialize in restoring beautiful smiles with dentures, dental implants, cosmetic dentistry, crowns, bridges, and more. They are dedicated to improving the oral health of their patients, from appearance to function.

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pains
in the jaw



Do your muscles or jaw joints hurt when you chew?

Does your jaw click or pop when you open your mouth?

Does your jaw occasionally lock or get stuck?

These can be symptoms of disorders known as TMJ or TMD.



What are the signs of TMJ?

Pain in the chewing muscles or jaw joint is the most common. Other symptoms include:

- Radiating pain in the face, jaw, or neck
- Jaw muscle stiffness
- Limited movement or locking of the jaw
- Painful clicking, popping, or grating in the jaw joint during movement
- A change in your bite

What causes TMJ disorders?

Jaw noises alone, without pain or limited jaw movement, do not indicate a TMJ disorder.

Trauma to the jaw may play a role in some TMJ disorders. But for most jaw joint and muscle problems, the cause may be unknown. There is no scientific evidence that clicking sounds in the jaw joint will lead to serious problems.

It's also unclear if tooth grinding is a major cause. Many patients with these disorders don't grind their teeth and many longtime tooth grinders don't have painful joint symptoms.

It is unclear to what degree, but stress might also play a role.

How long does it last?

For most patients, pain in the jaw joint or muscles is temporary, but may occur in cycles. Often the pain will go away with limited or no treatment, and symptoms can improve or disappear within a few weeks or months with self-care.

Some people, however, develop significant, long-term symptoms, such as severe pain and restricted jaw opening.

HOW CAN A PROSTHODONTIST HELP?

Your prosthodontist will create a personalized treatment plan to relieve your discomfort and improve your oral health.

Options may include:

Self-care

- Eat soft foods to rest your jaw.
- Apply ice packs to reduce inflammation.
- Avoid extreme jaw movements such as yawning, singing, clenching, or gum chewing.
- Reduce stress or consider cognitive behavior therapy.
- Practice gentle jaw stretching and relaxing exercises to increase jaw movement. A referral to a physical therapist might be necessary.

Medication

Short-term use of common pain medicines might provide temporary relief from jaw discomfort. When necessary, stronger pain or anti-inflammatory medications, muscle relaxants, or antidepressants may be prescribed.

Prosthetic treatment

Treatment might be necessary to stabilize the "bite" or occlusion, particularly following a diagnosis of localized osteoarthritis or degenerative joint disease.

These and other conditions often alter the jaw posture and cause an uneven bite. Extensive treatment should be provided only after the TMJ disorder has been adequately diagnosed and pain successfully managed.

Stabilization splint

Your prosthodontist might recommend a stabilization splint or bite guard. This plastic device fits over the upper or lower teeth. Stabilization splints should be used as prescribed by your prosthodontist. A splint should not cause permanent changes in your bite when it is removed from your mouth. While using a splint, you should be evaluated regularly. The splint may require adjustments by your prosthodontist.

Prior to extensive dental restorations, a splint may be used as a diagnostic device to re-establish the "bite" in patients with worn and missing teeth.

