

## TMJ: A much misunderstood condition.

**Definition:** "The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is the hinge joint that connects the lower jaw (mandible) to the temporal bone of the skull. Temporomandibular disorders (TMD) occur as a result of problems with the jaw, jaw joint, and surrounding facial muscles that control chewing and moving the jaw.

This joint is immediately in front of the ear on each side of your head. The joints are flexible, allowing the jaw to move smoothly up and down and side to side and enabling you to talk, chew, and yawn. Muscles attached to and surrounding the jaw joint control its position and movement (WebMD)."

**Temporo-Mandibular Joint Disease (TMJD)** is commonly referred to simply as **TMJ**.

**How many suffer and who is more likely to be affected?**

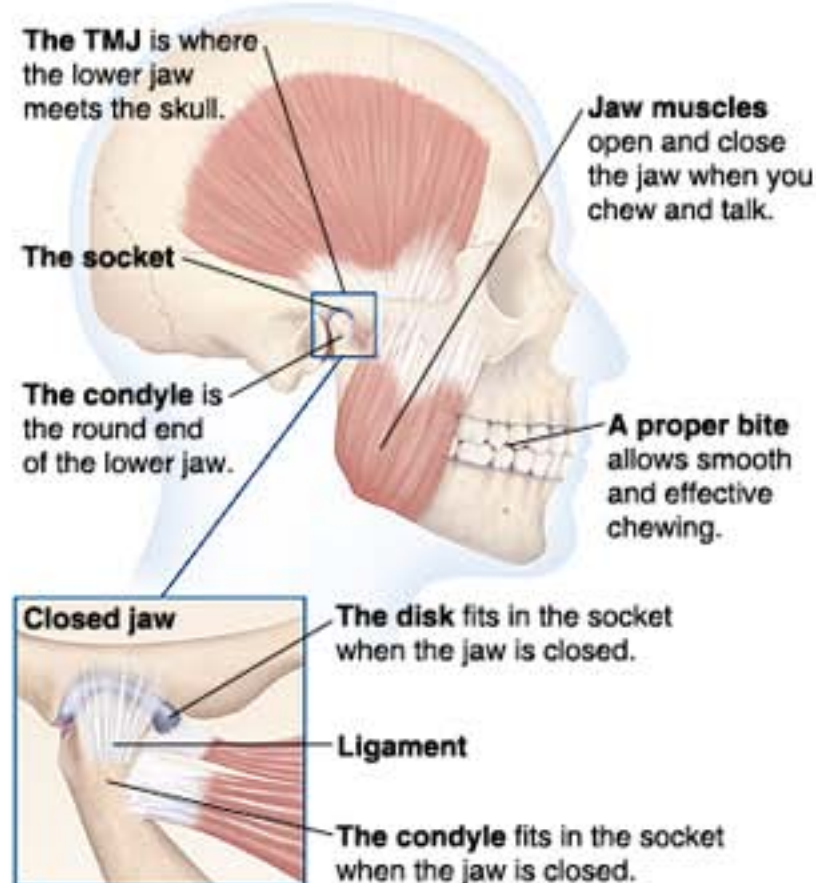
- 10 million affected in USA (The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH))
- More women than men are affected, particularly women of child-bearing age.

**What are some possible symptoms of TMJ?**

- Pain and (or) tenderness in the Jaw, Face, Neck, Shoulder, Back when you chew, bite, yawn, speak.
- Uncomfortable sensations when attempting to open the mouth
- Locking of the jaw when attempting to open or close the mouth when speaking, eating, or yawning or attempting to do so.
- Noises such as popping, grating, clicking in the jaw joint on mouth movement which may or may not be accompanied by pain.
- An uncomfortable bite which feels as if the upper and lower teeth are not fitting together properly.
- Swelling of the face in the areas around the affected joint
- Headaches
- Ringing or other types of noises in the ears
- Ear pain without an infection
- Poorer hearing
- Ultra-sensitive or aching teeth in the absence of dental problems
- Dizziness
- Vision issues

**How may one determine the possible cause?**

- Test for all medical and dental potential causes first. Rule out other causes that have some of the same or similar symptoms such as the many other causes for headaches, dizziness, and hearing loss.
- Attempt to remove or ameliorate all diagnosed medical and dental problems related to the TMJ Disorder.
- Once all medical and dental problems have been attended to (if there are any), should TMJ problems still remain, consider psychotherapeutic approaches to help ameliorate or eliminate bad habits and stress reactions which may be contributing to the TMJ such as:
  - o Clenching the jaw
  - o Grinding the teeth
  - o Generalized tension in many or all of the muscles of the face and jaw related to repeated life situations involving stress reactions, anxiety, fears, anger, grief, or physical pain in other areas of the body
- Psychotherapeutic intervention for the distress and pain caused by TMJ may also be needed while medical, surgical, or dental procedures are in process.
- Psychotherapeutic intervention may be the most positive recourse for better quality of life should you have any significant residual pain remaining after all needed medical, surgical, or dental procedures have been completed or deemed unsuccessful. Psychotherapeutic treatments to reduce pain and suffering may be used alone or in combination with pain medication.



**What may possibly cause TMJ?**

- Clenching the teeth
- Grinding the teeth
- Certain forms of arthritis
- Injuries to the jaw or nearby areas
- Dental procedures
- Hormone imbalance
- Low-level infections
- Auto-immune diseases
- Genetic predisposition
- Stretching the jaw for insertion of a breathing tube
- Facial muscle tension
- ...and more

**Treatment:**

- At our Center we only treat patients who have first been seen by a medical and (or) dental specialist for diagnostic evaluation.
- At our Center, psychotherapeutic approaches are matched to the patient and the patient's needs. These interventions help minimize or eliminate the pain and distress caused by TMJ and (or) help minimize or eliminate bad habits which may be causing the TMJ—such as clenching the jaw or grinding the teeth. Surely, if you are struggling with generalized tension in many or all of the muscles of the face and jaw related to repeated life situations involving stress reactions, anxiety, fears, anger, grief, or physical pain in other areas of the body, psychotherapeutic intervention is possibly the best avenue of attack for related TMJ symptoms.
- Frequently several techniques are integrated in therapy for the best results. These intervention techniques include but are not limited to the following:
  - o Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
  - o Guided Imagery
  - o Desensitization Therapy
  - o Hypnotherapy
  - o Anger Management
  - o Meditation
  - o Art Therapy

**Return to our website to read more about these techniques.**