What Are Temporomandibular Disorders (TMD)?

“A musculoskeletal disorder of the masticatory system that affects more than 25% of the general population”

- Signs and symptoms include: local pain in the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) and/or masticatory muscles, limited mouth movements, TMJ sounds, headaches, and ear pain
- 70% of patients with TMD have associated neck pain
- TMD rank second only to low back pain in the United States as a prevalent musculoskeletal problem, with treatment costing an average of four billion dollars annually

Physical Therapy: A Conservative Approach to Treating TMD

Causes include:

- Malocclusion
- Stress
- Head/neck trauma
- Poor head/neck posture
- Bad habits such as teeth clenching and grinding

Other associated factors include widespread pain, poor sleep, and depression.

TMD Classification

Disorders of the masticatory muscles: myalgia, myofascial pain, contracture, myospasm

Joint disorders: disc displacement with or without reduction, hypermobility, inflammation, degenerative disorders (osteoarthritis, osteoarthrosis)

Physical therapy for TMD: An Educational Guide

“An interdisciplinary approach between dentists and physical therapists has been shown to be more effective for the treatment of TMD than dentistry alone”
The importance of Physical Therapy for treatment of TMDs

- Physical therapy has been shown to be one of the most effective conservative treatments for TMDs.
- Physical therapists identify the components of the musculoskeletal system that contribute to the symptoms and functional limitations of each individual patient.

Treatment Options Include:

- Relaxation of the masticatory muscles including intra-oral massage
- Jaw exercises
- Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation
- Manual therapy including joint mobilizations
- Re-education of masticatory muscles for coordination, proprioception and strengthening of deep neck flexors and scapular muscles, and mobilizations
- Sleeping positions and re-education

Patient Education

Patients should be aware of their condition and related factors

- Anatomy and pathology of the condition involved
- Aggravating factors such as oral behavior (ie. grinding and clenching), head and neck postural alterations, and stress
- Activities to be avoided
- Participation in treatment including self-home exercises
- Ergonomic aspects

Evidence shows that manual therapy, exercise, and postural re-education are effective treatments to reduce symptoms of TMDs.

Selected References:


