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Home Therapies for TMJ Sufferers

- 1) Apply heat over tender muscles and apply cold over tender joints. At times, my patients choose to cool with ice packs first over both the muscles and joints for 5 minutes and then follow with heat for 15 minutes. This can be repeated several times a day.
- 2) Avoid overuse of jaw activities and behavior that fatigues the jaw muscles. This is critical to achieve healing. Overuse activities include gum chewing, nail & cuticle biting, biting on pens, pencils, straws, ice, plastic items, eyeglass frames; the list goes on.
- 3) Avoid clenching your teeth during the daytime.
- 4) Avoid cradling your phone between your shoulder and neck and try to reduce the amount of time you are texting. Your head in a forward posture for lengths of time wreaks havoc on your neck and jaw muscles.
- 5) Apply pain-soothing gels over the jaw, neck muscles, and jaw joints. These may include *BenGay*, *Aspercreme*, *Biofreeze*, but many other preparations are available in the local pharmacy. (Note: some of these products contain menthol, arnica, aspirin, and other anti-inflammatory ingredients so make sure you are not allergic or sensitive to these products.)
- 6) Muscle massage techniques can be used over the temporalis muscle and masseter muscle (which is the big muscle that bulges when you clench your teeth). These muscles can be rubbed and massaged as you would for a sore calf or thigh muscle, applying enough force to be uncomfortable but not too much force that your eyes tear. This can be done for 2-3 minutes 3-4 times a day and the best place to do it is in the shower. There are a number of YouTube videos you can watch to help guide your technique.
- 7) Avoid hard, large, tough, and/or chewy food. I don't recommend a mushy diet but rather a thoughtful diet. If you experience pain during or after a meal, you probably ate the wrong food.
- 8) Minimize caffeine intake (even chocolate) and nicotine use.
- 9) Abstain from drinking alcohol close to bedtime hours as it leads to restless sleep.
- 10) Hydrate with a good amount of water throughout the entire day.
- 11) Try your best to get 7-8 hours of restful sleep every night.
- 12) Avoid electronic stimulation prior to going to bed. Your cell phone, laptop, and other various devices can all negatively affect your sleep cycle.
- 13) Exercise routinely, at least a few times throughout the course of the week, to build endorphins and reduce daily stress. Endorphins are our bodies' natural painkillers.
- 14) Practice diaphragmatic breathing or even meditate during the day to slow the number of breaths you take per minute.

