

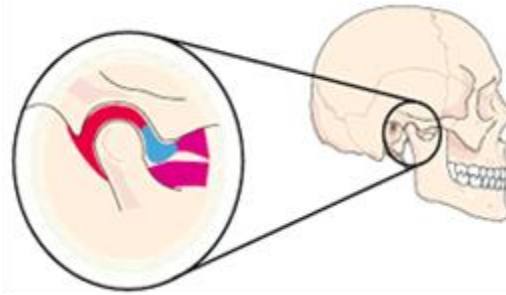
## What is TMJ?

TMJ is the easy way of saying temporomandibular joint, which although is an anatomic structure, has come to mean jaw joint dysfunction from a number of different causes. The temporomandibular joints connect the jawbone to the skull. Located at the sides of the head near each ear, these joints play an essential role in eating, speaking, and making facial expressions. In fact, the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is one of the most frequently used and complex joints in the entire body.

It has become common for people to refer to pain in the temporomandibular joint as "TMJ". In fact, TMJ is actually the name of the joint not the pain. Pain in this joint is really called TMJD (TemporoMandibular joint Disorder).

## What is TMJ Disorder or TMD?

TMJ disorder can develop when one or both of the temporomandibular joints stop functioning properly. TMJ disorder refers to any given condition that causes the malfunctioning or impairment of opening or closing of the mouth.



Excessive non-nutritive or non-speech oral behaviors, can also affect the condition of the teeth and health and functioning of the mouth, especially the jaw. When any oral behavior is excessive in intensity, duration, and frequency, the pressures or collision forces can have serious impact on normal oral facial appearance, oral facial health, and oral facial functioning.

This damages the structures and their surroundings resulting in acute or chronic inflammation of the temporomandibular joint. This can result in significant pain in the jaw area, jaw muscles, temporal (side of the head) back, neck frontal area, sinuses area as well as impairment of motor functions.

## Factors precipitating TMJ Disorder

There are many factors that put strain on the temporomandibular joint and thereby play a role in causing TMJ disorder. They include the following:

- Accidental trauma of the teeth
- Modification of bite pattern due to recent dental treatment that did not bring the jaw to its original position

- Grinding the teeth or any repetitive jaw movements
- Chewing gum or biting nails
- Long term digit sucking
- Swallowing with the tongue between the teeth causing joint displacement
- Open mouth breathing
- Poor sleeping habits

Swallowing with a tongue thrust can aggravate the TMD condition by displacing the joint. The action of the jaw moving forward and backwards within the joint space results in micro-trauma causing inflammation and irritation.

Upper airway infections and obstructions are frequently identified as causes of oral myofunctional disorders which can lead to TMJD, especially when these problems cause the mouth to rest open most of the time. Reduced oral muscle tone or poor orofacial muscle postures will impact negatively on the mouth and facial structures. Sometimes poor speech articulation patterns may indicate physical deficits. TMJD is often multi faceted and oral behaviors can be the result of stimuli which are no longer fully obvious. A full assessment of these conditions will allow the myofunctional therapist to help you.

## Symptoms associated with TMJ Disorder

TMJ symptoms include but are not limited to:

- Frequent headaches
- Uncomfortable bite
- Neck/shoulder/back pain
- Pain of the face
- Pain and/or noise by the ear

- Ear ache
- Jaw locking/popping/clicking
- Speech pattern disorders
- Diminished hearing
- Decreased motion/opening of the lower jaw
- Deviation of the lower jaw with opening and/or closing

Sufferers of TMJD may experience either sharp pain or a dull, constant ache. If the condition is left untreated, it could result in being a very debilitating problem later in life.

For proper diagnosis and treatment of TMJ conditions, a patient may require evaluations from multiple specialists. Like many other health problems, TMJ dysfunction does not have a standard approach, and it depends whether you want to treat the cause (if possible), or treat just the symptoms. Not only dentists, but chiropractors, physical therapists, physicians, cranial osteopaths, and myofunctional therapists treat TMJ dysfunction.

### Treatment of TMJ Disorder

At present, there are many treatments in use ranging from very conservative, reversible therapies to more aggressive, invasive approaches. Over the past 100 years there has been considerable research published about the causes of jaw problems. Myofunctional therapy is a very conservative treatment and is much like physical therapy for the jaw.

Regardless of the causation, once inappropriate oral behavioral patterns are

established, they tend to continue until some external stimulus, therapy, or treatment alters enough of the patterns so that new behaviors can be learned. You may be referred for oral myofunctional therapy when there are indications that dental treatment alone may not bring about the desired changes. Adverse oral behaviors can often interfere with your TMJ treatments and your oral stability and condition.

### Can Myofunctional Therapy help?

Oral Myofunctional Therapy is a structured, individualized therapy for retraining and restoring normal oral functioning. It is a form of orofacial orthopedics. It seeks to inhibit incorrect muscle movements, and to develop normal, easy functions of oral rest posture, oral stage of swallowing, and speech articulation. Therapy may include any or all of the following:

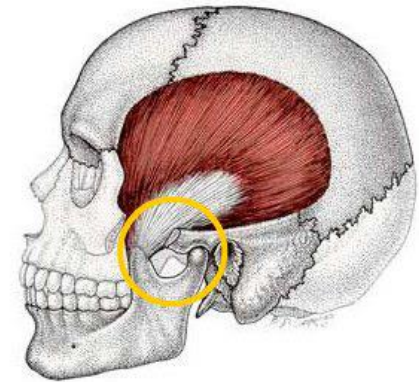
- Elimination of damaging oral habits
- Relaxation exercises
- Nasal respiration
- Correct resting tongue placement
- Swallowing exercises
- Strengthening exercises for the 'muscle matrix' in the face and head
- Myofascial release of the muscles supporting the TMJ
- Sleeping posture coaching
- Neuromuscular repatterning of the oral and facial muscles

Studies show that a duo treatment with a dental splint and myofunctional therapy helped resolve TMJD issues by 86%, whereas on 50% received relief with a splint alone. Subjects who followed the combined

treatment were able to eliminate the pain-triggering sites and the hearing symptoms, and succeeded in increasing their jaw movement with increased mouth opening.

For more information about TMJD, contact:

## TMJ DISORDER



### Nebraska Myofunctional Specialties

**Pat Brinkman-Falter, PHRDH, MS, COM**  
*Board Certified Orofacial Myologist*

(402) 759-2561 or (402) 882-2MYO  
 Offices in Lincoln, Omaha and York, Nebraska  
[pat@nebraskamyo.com](mailto:pat@nebraskamyo.com)

[www.NebraskaMyo.com](http://www.NebraskaMyo.com)  
[www.facebook.com/NeMyoSpecialties](https://www.facebook.com/NeMyoSpecialties)