

# Preventive TMJ Dysfunction Instructions

**Avoid oral parafunctional habits.** Oral parafunctional habits are anything you do with your mouth other than normal eating, speaking, or swallowing (normal functional activities). Examples of parafunctional habits can include chewing gum, biting your nails, chewing on pens or pencils, clenching or grinding your teeth, etc.

**Avoid excessives.** This would be things like opening excessively wide, chewing excessively hard things like ice, or doing normal functional activities but in an excessive manner. Try to limit how wide you open when you yawn. Supporting your lower jaw with your hand to limit opening may help. Avoid opening widely to eat a thick sandwich or other foods. Try flattening food before eating it.

**Avoid placing pressure on lower jaw.** Resting your head on your lower jaw places a lot of pressure on your jaw joint (TMJ). The force of all the weight of your upper body can be transferred to the joint as you do this. Lying on the floor watching TV, while propping your head on your hands, or sitting at a table or a desk and propping your head on your hands are examples of this type of activity. As a substitute, if you have to prop your head up, do it by resting your head on your cheek bone rather than your lower jaw.

**Avoid sleep on your face.** Sleeping on your stomach, you tend to place pressure on your lower jaw. Even sleeping on your side can do the same. Consider getting a special orthopedic pillow to support your head and/or try to sleep on your back. When you do sleep on your side, make sure you are not placing pressure on your lower jaw.

**Avoid any activity that could traumatize your lower jaw.** Certain activities, such as playing a musical wind instrument, and certain contact sports, such as football or martial arts, may traumatize the TMJ.

**Avoid making joint noise (if you can) if your jaw already makes noise.** By purposely making the joint noise, you could be aggravating or damaging the joint even more.

**Avoid caffeine and nicotine.** Both cause the nervous system to be in a hyper-excitable state. This, in turn, can cause the facial and mouth muscles to be more tense and excitable, and thus could worsen or aggravate your joint condition.

**Avoid or eliminate as much stress in your life as possible.** Stress is known to be a significant contributing factor in many TMJ problems. Regular exercise and rest can help decrease stress.

**Avoid facial trauma when traveling in a motor vehicle.** Auto accidents can create whiplash injuries and other types of head and neck trauma. This can be a significant negative impact on the health of the TMJ. Be sure you wear your seat belt and shoulder harness.

*By following all of these suggestions, hopefully you can minimize the possibility of continued or future jaw joint problems. It may not. Some people, no matter what preventative measures are taken, may go on to develop clinically significant TMJ dysfunction.*