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TMJ: Temporomandibular Joint Irregularity

Some 60 million Americans have TMJ. Simply put, TMJ is the syndrome that happens when the muscles in the jaw and the temporomandibular joint are out of alignment or misaligned, causing problems when chewing. In plain English, the ligaments, muscles, bones, and joints do not line up, causing pain.

Some Symptoms Associated with TMJ:

1. a clicking, popping or grating sound when opening or closing the mouth
2. headaches and/or dizziness
3. tenderness in the jaw muscles
4. earache
5. jaws that sometimes lock open when yawning or if mouth is held open
6. spasm or cramps in the jaw area (very common)

What Causes TMJ? These are the most common causes:

1. accidents
2. developmental (natural) defects, including the wearing-down of teeth or fillings causing a misalignment of the teeth
3. surgery
4. orthodontics
5. stress that causes clenching of the jaws and grinding of the teeth
6. naturally misaligned teeth

What Can Be Done to Correct TMJ?

- If the temporomandibular area has been damaged by arthritis or as a result of an accident, surgery may be needed to correct the TMJ and re-establish the proper occlusion. Far more likely, your doctor will recommend a therapy that may include a bite splint and specific exercises to keep the teeth from touching and to allow the joint to remain lined up, allowing the jaw's hinge area to relax. Such therapy increases your comfort by diminishing the TMJ pain. If a splint is prescribed for you, it is very important that you follow your doctor's instructions regarding the amount of time and time of day you must wear it.
- If your condition is TMJ, you need to wear your splint all the time unless directed otherwise. Do not remove the splint when you eat, as this would compromise your treatment and diminish its effect. The splint stops tooth-to-tooth contact and keeps your jaw lined up properly, allowing the muscles and joint area to heal. As this healing takes place and the symptoms gradually disappear, your doctor will adjust your splint to keep your teeth properly aligned. During this period of your therapy, you will begin wearing the splint fewer hours of the day and, after a period of time, you will no longer need to wear a splint.

Grinding ("bruxism") and Clenching: These conditions require you to wear your splint only at night, while sleeping.

Clean the splint by brushing it. Keep it in water and mouthwash solution when it is not in your mouth.