



Self Treatment for a Sore Jaw

Diet

Eliminate foods that are difficult to chew or require you to open your mouth wide, such as apples, carrots, nuts, hard candy, bagels, and hard rolls. You can prepare these foods so they will not require as much work for your jaws. For example, applesauce or shredded carrots are easier to chew than raw apples or whole carrots. Avoid tough meats like steak. Avoid chewy foods and gum.

Changing your Resting and Sleeping Habits

Whenever you lie down to sleep or rest, avoid stressing your jaw joints and try lying on your back or side rather than your stomach. Avoid putting any pressure on your jaws while sleeping. Try using a single, flat pillow instead of a thick pillow. Avoid leaning on your jaw when sitting.

Changing Harmful Oral Habits

Do you chew on pencils or your fingernails? Do you bite your lips? Do you clench or grind your teeth when you sleep or tighten your jaw muscles when you drive or are in a stressful situation? Habits like these are common. The first step in breaking oral habits is to recognize what they are, as well as when and how they occur. Remind yourself "Lips together, teeth apart," which is the normal resting position of the jaw. Keep your jaw muscles relaxed! When at rest or sleeping, keep the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth, just behind the front teeth in the "N" position. This is the position the tongue should be in when saying the letter "N" (with lips together, teeth apart).

Moist Heat

Moist heat penetrates better than dry heat. Heat a towel by holding it under running hot water and wring it out until it is damp. If you have a microwave oven, try using it to heat a damp towel. Put the towel in the microwave oven for 15 seconds. If that does not get the towel hot enough, increase the time gradually until the towel is hot but not too hot to handle. When the towel has cooled enough so that you can handle it comfortably, apply it to the painful side of your face for about 5-10 minutes. For best results, do this several times a day.

Ice

If heat does not relieve the pain and stiffness, try alternating heat and ice. Apply moist heat for 5 minutes, then an ice pack for 5 minutes, and then heat again. Repeat as needed. Be careful not to freeze or frostbite the skin.

Over-the-counter Medication

Use aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, or acetaminophen to control pain in the jaws, head, and neck. These help by reducing muscle tension pain and muscle tension headaches. Use as directed.

Jaw Stretching - Exercise #1

Stretch your mouth with your middle two knuckles or middle 3 fingertips for 10 seconds. Avoid wide yawning and do not open beyond 3 finger widths.

Jaw Resistance – Exercise #2

Place your thumb under your chin. Push upward with your thumb, using mild to moderate force and slowly open your mouth halfway against the resistance. Do 10 repetitions. If your jaw joints click or are painful when doing this exercise, move your lower jaw forward to the position where your front teeth line up end-to-end, then perform this exercise.

NOTE: If either exercise causes significant pain, discontinue until you see your health care provider.