

## Mom's Rules To Help With TMD Pain

**Get a good night's sleep.** Pain conditions are made worse by lack of sleep. Most people need 7-8 hours a night. Lack of adequate sleep can lead to musculoskeletal pain conditions. Don't sleep on your stomach. This puts excess strain on your jaw and neck muscles. Try going to bed and getting up on a regular schedule. Avoid tobacco and alcohol for 2-3 hours before bedtime and try to relax in the evening.

**Stand up straight.** Poor posture can contribute to muscle overload and to pain in the neck and jaws. Do not tilt your head to the side. Make sure your head is above your spine, not held in a forward position. This is especially important when sitting in front of a computer. Keep your shoulders back and down, not rounded forward or pulled up. Don't carry a heavy shoulder bag, as this can affect your posture.

**If it hurts, don't do it.** Avoid overloading or overusing your muscles and joints. Do not chew gum. Eat foods you can chew comfortably, avoiding hard/chewy foods and opening wide to bite into a large portion. Keep your teeth apart. They should only touch when chewing or swallowing.

**When it hurts, do this.** Apply heat to the area of discomfort 2-4 times a day for 10 minutes each time. Some people find that ice is more beneficial, but do not use for longer than 10 minutes at a time. Experiment and see what works best for you. Use anti-inflammatory and pain reducing medications, such as Motrin or Tylenol, to help as recommended by your doctor.

**Eat a balanced diet.** Proper nutrients enable healing to take place better. Eat regularly. Don't skip meals or get too hungry during the day. Drops in blood sugar levels can contribute to pain, especially headaches.

**Avoid excess alcohol & caffeine and for goodness sake don't use tobacco.** Caffeine makes muscles tense, which can contribute to jaw pain. If you want to cut down on caffeine, to avoid a headache, don't do it all at once. Decreasing about 10% per week usually works well. Alcohol may make you feel like you sleep better, but too much actually keeps you from getting the right amount of deep, restorative sleep. Tobacco constricts blood vessels, which keeps oxygen from getting to the tissues and inhibits healing, besides all those other reasons your own mom gave you.

**Go outside and play.** Exercise is beneficial in terms of stress management and circulation, getting oxygen to the parts of the body that need it. Follow a routine that is appropriate for your level of conditioning.

**Don't stress out!** Stress management is critical. Relax the body throughout the day. Sit in a quiet room, listen to soothing music, or take a warm bath. If you need someone to talk to about a specific problem, we can refer you to someone who can help.

**Don't run with scissors.**

