

Exercises for Temporomandibular Disorder

Exercises are a practical component to the successful rehabilitation to the strained temporomandibular (jaw) joint. One must be cautioned to the execution of these exercises in order to prevent re-injury of the joint. Any exercise program must be judiciously applied. The execution of these exercises must be within the directed limits described.

Range of Motion, a warm-up stretch

Upon reduced pain with successful use of medications, appliance therapy and prior home care instructions move the jaws in the manner described. With the teeth lightly touching in a closed mouth position envision a pencil pointing directly down from your chin. The pencil is pointing to home plate of an imaginary baseball diamond. Move your jaw forward and to the right, pointing the pencil as if to first base of that baseball diamond. Move the jaw to second base, as if straight forward from the home plate or closed position. Move the jaw to the third base, forward and left of the closed position. Move the jaw back to home plate. Your movements should take you around the baselines. You can also move backwards around the bases, home to third, second, first and home again. Your movements should allow you to 'cross the pitcher's mound,' moving back and forth from first to third and forward and backward from home plate to second base. Each movement should be repeated eight to twelve times four to six times daily. **Caution:** Do not move your jaw outside baselines. If tenderness or pain occurs cease this stretch and notify the office.

Strengthening the Jaw Joint

Place your finger into the notch in the front of your chin then apply a slight resistance to cause the nail bed of your finger nail to blanch. Keeping your elbow next to your side, glide your jaw along the same motions as above. Stop if a painful episode results. Notify the office and reinstitute the baseball diamond activity without resistance.

As the above exercises are accomplished without difficulty, open your mouth as widely as possible. Sometimes popsicle sticks can aid jaw opening with leverage between the front teeth. Apply light pressure, do not force the jaws, aid them in opening. Ideally you should open to the width of three fingers. Once this width is easily attained, use your finger, as above to the notch of your chin, to offer resistance to both opening and closing.

Neck and Shoulder

With success to the above exercises, picture a pencil extending forward from your chin. Draw a smile line by moving your chin upward to the right and back to normal posture then, upward to the left. Place the palm of your hand to the side of your head and press your head against resistance of your hand and arm. Do the same to the front and back of your head with your opposite arm as well. Notify the office if a painful episode occurs.